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THE MEN IN GREEN.

By "NONAME."



When half way over a shot was heard from the bank he had just left, and a bullet pierced the crown of his hat, passing uncomfortably near his head. Quick as a flash the boy raised his rifle and fired.

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THE MEN IN GREEN.

By "NONAME,"

Author of "Dandy Dan of Deadwood in Texas," "Dandy Dan of Deadwood Betrayed," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

IN the early days of the gold excitement in California—in June, 1850, to be more explicit—a good-sized mining camp was located on the banks of the Feather river, a tributary of the Sacramento, one of the chief rivers of that promising country.

The camp was dignified by the name of Nuggetville, boasted a store, a hotel, a newspaper office, a theater, and a gambling-saloon in full blast; the place itself, though somewhat straggling, having a population of about five hundred souls.

One thing it lacked, however, and that was a woman, there being not a solitary petticoat to be seen in its streets, the masculine gender being the only one represented there.

The cooks were men, and the waiting "maids," to use a somewhat Milesian expression, were Chinamen.

The arrival of the stage, once a week, was always a matter of considerable importance, and on this bright, sunny afternoon in June quite a crowd of miners, adventurers, gamblers and men of no particular vocation had gathered on the broad porch of Sam White's tavern, which was store and post-office as well, to witness the event and comment on the new arrivals.

Presently, down the rough, dusty road, the lumbering stage-coach, drawn by four powerful horses, was seen dashing along; the driver, old Jeff Ferguson, reining in his steeds, preparatory to coming to a halt in front of the wide, low flight of steps leading to the piazza and thence to the hotel.

The coach-top was loaded with numerous boxes and chests, upon which sat three or four men, two others sitting on the seat alongside Jeff Ferguson.

Strapped on behind, on top of a lot of rough canvas bags, was an object that caused considerable comment; for it was a little, black, brass-nailed trunk, as unlike anything in the usual way of baggage as could be imagined.

"Bet yer boots we're going to have a parson," muttered one old fellow, whose ruby nose denoted a fondness for the bottle. "Who ever heard of a miner with a trunk?"

"A parson!" roared another. "Reckon he'll have to turn dealer up at Gentleman Dick's, then; for the only prayer books we have in town is a pack o' keards. Ho, ho! we ain't got no use for a preacher out yer!"

"Blow my buttons off if I don't see the flutter of a handkercher!" cried a young fellow of about seventeen, who had come out here from the East with his father to try and retrieve their fallen fortunes.

At this moment the stage dashed by the door, turning a few steps further down, and then coming to a halt.

As it dashed by, however, Ned Henderson, the young fellow before mentioned, cried out excitedly:

"Blow my buttons clear off, if there isn't a young woman in the coach!"

This announcement, of course, created a considerable stir, and the whole congregation of loungers, bummers, miners and all, crowded forward to get a look at the unwonted sight.

"Drive closer up to the steps, Jeff!" cried Ned, who was in front; "don't ye know you've got a lady inside?"

"Bet yer boots I do, Ned, and the fust one I've ever druv over. This air is a big day for me, youngone, and no mistake."

Jeff had now brought his coach alongside, and Ned, elbowing aside the eager crowd, opened the coach door, and doffing his slouched hat, said, with rough politeness:

"Let the lady out first, gents. This is the first time our town has been so honored, and we want to make a note on't."

The lady a pretty, girlish creature of about twenty, blushed, smiled, and appeared to be a little afraid at first, but taking courage upon seeing Ned's frank, handsome face, gave him her hand and allowed him to assist her to the steps.

At sight of the neat, trim figure and pretty face of the new-comer, the crowd, which had evidently expected to see some sour-visaged old maid, with a row of corkscrew curls flanking each temple, divided and left a narrow lane, up which the gallant and greatly envied Ned led his new acquaintance.

Sam White stepped forward as they reached the door, and with a broad grin, said awkwardly:

"Good-day, miss—glad to see ye in town; ye're the fust lady we see in this yer country, and we're durned glad to make yer acquaintance. What kin I do fur ye?"

"This is the landlord, miss," explained Ned; "but maybe your friends are in the coach."

"Friends! No. I came alone. I expected to meet some one here."

"Do you see them?" asked Ned, motioning to the crowd to fall back.

"No," after scanning the faces of the curious men standing around; "and perhaps it may be a day or so before he will come into the town."

"Consider this yer house at yer disposal!" cried Sam. "Jest step into the parlor while I have yer quarters got ready. Here you, Hop Wing, yer lazy heathen, get the fust floor front ready for the lady, and be gold-darned quick, too, or I'll twist yer pigtail for yer, in jest about a shake."

"All right," chimed a round-faced Celestial, who had been hovering near, and then he skipped off to do Sam's bidding in great haste.

"That yer trunk is your'n, I 'spose," said Ned, "'cause nobody brings trunks into these yer diggings. I'll bring it in for you."

"You're very kind," said the lady, with a smile, as Ned sprang down the steps and picked up the trunk, which had now been on the ground with the other baggage.

Sam White led his new guest into a rough, uncarpeted room, with a sanded floor, green paper curtains to the windows, two or three highly colored prints of celebrated races and professional beauties on the whitewashed walls, and a plain pine table in the center, flanked by four unpainted chairs.

This room was occasionally used for a quiet game of bluff, but fortunately there were no gambling implements about, and Sam was glad of it, and as his visitor took a proffered chair, he said, pleasantly:

"Glad to have ye make yerself ter hum jest as long as ye please, mum, and shan't charge ye a grain. Ladies is suthin' new hereabouts, and we can't make too much on 'em. You jest sit yer a bit and amuse yerself, and I'll go and tell the niggers to get ye suthin' to eat. Ther's books on the shelf, and ye can take yer pick."

Leaving his guest to take her choice from this library, Sam went out, and after giving his orders, called the loungers into the bar, and seeing that Ned hung back, gave him a special invitation.

"Now, gents, this is a special occasion, and I am going to honor it. Call for what ye like, and arter that I've got a proposition to make."

Ned did not drink, but when the rest had been supplied, Sam said:

"Now, gents, the fust woman has arrived in town, and we ought to make it an occasion of rejoicin'. I'm going to let her stop here as long as she likes."

"And I'll give her one o' the best minin'

claims on the river—half of my own," spoke up Bob Trainor, one of the luckiest miners in that section, a handsome young fellow of twenty-five.

"And I'll give her the whole of mine," said Ned, "and as it lies next to Bob's it'll make one good solid chunk."

Cheers followed this announcement, and Jeff, the stage-driver, added:

"And I'll agree to take her free over the road whenever she wants to ride."

"Gentlemen," said Dick Ludlow, a professional gambler and quite the swell of the place, "I want to make up a purse, and I'll start it with fifty dollars—honest money, mind," he added, quickly. "There isn't a dollar but what's been made square. I got it out of my washings."

Others contributed until the sum of nearly five hundred dollars was made up, and put into a leather wallet, to be given to the young lady as a token of the esteem with which the miners all regarded her.

"You, Ned Henderson," said Sam, "we appoint as a committee o' one to wait on the young lady, and tell her what we've done. Gents, do you approve of the choice?"

"Yes, yes!" cried all in chorus, though not a few envied Ned.

"And tell her, besides, that if she likes to choose any man of us, what ain't married—and they's lots of such—for her husband, the lucky man will feel bound to take her, and be durned glad to get her too."

Ned, then taking the money and the deeds of the claims, betook himself to the parlor, where the young lady was just finishing her meal, and delivered the message of the convention.

The lady blushed, smiled sweetly, and then said:

"You are all very kind, and I do not see how I can well refuse your gifts without giving offense, though, as far as taking a husband is concerned, I am not quite ready for that yet."

"Oh, we can wait," said Ned, naively, blushing in his turn. "That's a matter in which one wants time, of course, Miss—"

and then he stopped.

"Ainsley is my name—Cora Ainsley. I had a brother who—"

"Not Tom Ainsley?" interrupted Ned.

"Yes; do you know anything—"

She suddenly paused, for Ned had averted his face, across which she had seen a shade of pain suddenly appear.

"Speak—has anything happened to him?" she cried, suddenly seizing Ned's hand, and forcing him gently but firmly to look into her eyes. "You are my friend; I know, I feel it. Tell me all, for suspense is worse than certainty."

"Your brother has disappeared—"

"Dead?" the young girl gasped.

"No; not dead, but—"

"Not dead! Then something worse has happened. In Heaven's name tell me all!"

"Oh, spare me this!" cried Ned, in agony.

"I would not give you pain for the world; do not force me to speak, or—"

Strangely calm, Cora sat down, drawing Ned towards her, and in a strained, husky voice, said:

"Tom Ainsley has gone to the bad! He was always wild, but he seemed repentant, and I thought that in the wild West he might retrieve himself. What you fear to tell me is that he has committed some crime and has been forced to fly?"

"I never believed him guilty, but others did, and they would have lynched him, but he escaped. He has been reported dead, but I have reason to believe that he is still alive. If Ned Henderson can prove his innocence,

"my dear lady, it will be the best job I ever undertook in my life."

"Ned Henderson! Then it is you that has given me all your land?"

"It is not nearly as much as what Bob Trainor has given, but if it had been more you should have it, and I'll do anything in the world for you, if you'll only let me."

"Prove my brother innocent, and I will be your wife."

CHAPTER II.

NUGGETVILLE, while it had attracted many strong, hardy, honest fellows, who were ready and willing to give everybody an equal chance with themselves, had also gathered to its golden shores some of the very worst characters to be found in the whole world.

Thieves, gamblers, blacklegs, murderers, ruffians of every grade and variety, loafers, pickpockets and sharpers had been drawn thither, as wolves by the smell of blood, and with just about as good intentions.

Like many other new towns, therefore, the little settlement was for a time one of the most lawless on the Pacific slope, and honest men gave it a wide berth, notwithstanding the reputed wealth to be made there.

This state of affairs had not altogether altered at the opening of our story, although the lawless element had been greatly put down.

Tom Ainsley had been accused of murder, and the circumstantial evidence against him was so strong that many were forced to believe him guilty in spite of themselves, this feeling increasing when it was learned that he had fled, barely escaping being lynched by so doing.

His sister Cora, notwithstanding her brother's alleged misdeeds, was gladly welcomed in town, and made a perfect idol of, though as the sight of her trim figure passing along the streets became more familiar, the excitement gradually subsided, and she was not followed and stared at as she had been at first.

Two men were her devoted admirers, and the outside public could not tell which of the two she favored most, Ned Henderson or Bob Trainor, though Bob knew well that Ned had the upper hand, and was more or less envious of the latter's good fortune.

Ned undertook the management of the young lady's claim, and this rather soured Bob, for the greater part of it had been his, and it now seemed as if he had given the land to Ned instead of to Miss Ainsley, and actually so if Ned succeeded in his suit, of which there seemed to be every probability.

One day a miner came into the town and reported that he had been attacked by three or four men, dressed in suits of buckskin, dyed green, who had robbed him and might have killed him had he not escaped.

Shortly after this a claim, situated at some distance from the center, was suddenly raided by a dozen of these men in green, the miners driven away, the bags of gold-dust captured, and the owners forced to fly, one or two being seriously hurt in the struggle, so that it was hardly expected that they would live.

Several of the settlers began to lose their horses and cattle, and one man living a distance had his house entered and pillaged; his son, a boy of fifteen, reporting having seen the men as they were leaving, and describing them as being dressed all in green, so that as they hurried off through the trees they could hardly be distinguished.

One night there was a considerable party gathered in the bar of Sam White's tavern, and in one corner four men were sitting around a rough table playing poker, the bets amounting to considerable money at times.

Ned had remained late in the center, possibly to converse with Cora, or possibly to talk business with her, and before starting for home, his pony being hitched to a post outside, he had strolled into the room to see what was going on.

He found himself near the table where the men were playing and talking, one man expressing it as his opinion that Tom Ainsley was at the head of the mysterious band of outlaws of which so much had lately been heard.

"He's a mean, contemptible cuss," growled the man, "and as a feller what'd kill a man'd steal a sheep, more'n likely he's at the bottom of this yer business."

"You're a nice sort of feller to abuse an absent man, aren't you?" thought Ned. "I

didn't like your looks when I first caught sight of you, and I like 'em less now. You'll stand watching, my friend."

And Ned did watch him so close, but without appearing to do so, withal, that he presently detected the fellow secreting two cards in his lap.

On the next hand being dealt out, the man slyly picked up the two cards, Ned catching sight of them as he did so, and when the betting began, he ran the stakes up considerably.

One of the others, thinking he was bluffing, followed him up until the pile of dust and coin in the center of the table was considerable, the second man finally calling for a show of hands.

"You can't beat what I've got!" said the blusterer.

"There's four kings," said the other; "now show up!"

"Four aces," responded the other, putting down his cards. "The pot is mine."

"Hold on!" said Ned, coming up. "You didn't draw those aces in the reg'lar way. You took two of 'em out of yer lap, and I saw ye do it!"

"What have you got to do with the game?" snapped the other, turning crimson. "You ain't got no money on it!"

"That's all right, but I ain't going to see a man swindled right afore my eyes. I tell ye I saw ye drop them two cards into yer lap, and then when ye struck a couple of aces, fetched 'em up."

"Then the pot is mine," cried the man with the four kings.

"It's a durned cheat!" yelled the other, springing up and trying to save his money. "This young cub is yer pal, and the hull business has been fixed up atween ye."

"Yer wrong thar," put in one of the other players. "Ned Henderson is as honest a young feller as ever lived, and he ain't a party to no swindle."

"Yer all in it, 'cause I'm a stranger. Call up the landlord, and let him settle it."

"I'll swear that what I say is true," affirmed Ned, stoutly. "Stranger, eh? How came you to know so much about young Ainsley, if you are? I sized you up at once, when you began to slander a man behind his back. Ye're no good, and, if I was Sam, I'd put ye out of the place quicker'n chain-lightning."

"What's the matter, gents?" asked Sam, coming hastily forward.

"This yer young whelp, what's sweet on Ainsley's gal, says I cheated. He's so ready to defend him, I guess he's one o' the men in green hisself."

"That's all your eye. If you want to cheat, ye can't do it here; and if Ned says ye done it, I believe him. Take yer own pile and git out. We don't want ye."

"If he says I cheated he's a liar!" At this imputation Ned could not further contain himself.

Springing forward, he planted a blow right on the man's nose, causing the blood to flow.

Then with his open hands he struck the bully across each cheek, leaving four long white marks, with red spaces between, on his flesh.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Recovering himself, the man drew a big horse-pistol, and blazed away at random.

Fortunately no one was hurt—one of the bullets breaking a lamp; another lodging in the ceiling, and a third crashing through a window.

The ruffian would have fired again, but Sam sprang upon him, seized him by the collar, whirled him around, and shoving him towards the door, lifted one of his big feet when within three or four paces of it, and sent the man that was so anxious for a fight flying through it into the road, where he fell all in a heap considerably the worse for wear.

"Take yer own money out, Dan Jones," said Sam, "and divide the rest between ye. Any feller that tries any skin-game in my shop has got to lose all he puts up. That's the forfeit for cheatin'. Go on with yer amusements, gentlemen, and don't let a trifle like this yer disturb ye. The house is settin' 'em up; what'll ye take?"

Ned, having nothing further to detain him, now determined to take his departure; and after saying good-night to Sam and others, went outside to get his pony.

To his surprise the animal was missing.

The fellow so summarily expelled by the landlord had revenged himself on Ned by running away with his pony.

"Oh, well, I can get another in the morning," muttered Ned. "And, anyhow, I shall know Dick again, so that if this fellow is seen with him there will be plenty to make him dismount. The fellow seems to be a stranger, and yet is well informed concerning the men of the town. I wonder who he is?"

Ned could have borrowed an animal from Sam White, or any one inside, but not considering it worth his while, started off on foot, the road being so well known, that daylight or darkness were alike the same to him.

There was one part of the road which wound around high bluffs, where the path was not more than wide enough to allow of the passage of a single team, the trees above shading it so that even in the daytime a semi-twilight always reigned there.

On went the young fellow until, as he reached this spot, he suddenly felt something drop over his shoulders and fall about his body.

Thinking that a creeper, or possibly a dead branch, had fallen on him, he raised one arm to brush it away, when he suddenly felt something drawn tightly about him, pinioning his arms closely to his side, and in another moment he was drawn off his feet and hung suspended over the path.

CHAPTER III.

It at once dawned upon Ned's mind that some one, from the rocks above, had lowered a lasso upon him and that he was a prisoner.

However, there was little time for thought, as he was quickly drawn up some ten feet and placed upon a projecting ledge by some shadowy forms whose identity he could not make out.

A dark lantern was suddenly flashed in his face and as suddenly put out, one of the men uttering a grunt of satisfaction and quickly calling his comrades to his aid.

Ned was then gagged and blinded, the lariat still being securely fastened about his arms, and in this helpless condition he was led away, whither he knew not.

All was still dark when, after several minutes' walk, he was brought to a halt and thrown upon a bed of some soft material and left to himself, his captors departing without a sound.

The place was literally as black as night, and he could not tell whether it was a house or a cave, knowing only by the air of his prison that he was not out of doors.

He passed the night in alternate sleep and wakefulness, and in the morning was led out into the open air, as he could tell by the different feeling of the atmosphere.

He was led quite a distance, however, before the bandage was removed from his eyes, and although it was a few moments before he could see distinctly, he perceived that he was surrounded by a number of men, and that he was standing on the banks of a swiftly running stream.

When he finally recovered the full use of his eyes, he saw that sitting or standing around were a dozen or twenty men, all clothed in suits of buckskin dyed a bright green, and wearing dark, broad-brimmed felt hats and high boots, all fully armed, and all carrying little bugles at their belts.

"You appear somewhat surprised at our appearance," said a man, sitting near upon a mossy bank, whose superior bearing betokened him to be the leader of the band.

Ned started and gazed earnestly into the speaker's face.

Unless he was greatly mistaken, or suffering under some optical trouble, the man was none other than Tom Ainsley, whose innocence he had so lately asserted.

"Who are you?" he asked, in surprise.

"My name is Hood, and, from my occupation, they call me the Robin Hood of the West."

"And your companions?"

"They are the Men in Green!"

The truth dawned upon Ned in an instant; for on looking about him, he saw, among the rest, the very man with whom he had had the trouble the night before.

"You are outlaws!" he cried. "It is you, then, that have lately committed so many crimes?"

"I am Robin Hood, and these are my friends," was the cool reply. "We are free rovers, and claim that the earth and all in it should be shared equally by all men. We divide our wealth equally, and—"

"Make everybody else share with ye, whether they like it or not?" interposed Ned.

"That's it, exactly," returned Hood, with a light laugh. "We believe in share and share alike, and enforce our rule whenever an opportunity offers."

"Then Robin Hood and his Merry Men are but names for outlaws and robbers—the same now as in olden times. Why in thunder don't ye call yerselves cut-throats and have done with it?"

"Won't you join us?"

"No; I'll be blamed if I will!" returned Ned, hotly, relapsing into the rough dialect of the mountains in his excitement; and then with one quick bound he attempted to spring into the river and thus escape, secured as he was.

He was quickly seized, however, and brought before the chief.

"I was willing to give you one chance," said Hood, sternly; "but now you have forfeited my respect, and our laws must take their course."

"Laws! What the mischief do you fellows know of law? Blow my buttons off if I ever heard such rubbish."

"Ye thought ye was smart, givin' me away last night, didn't ye?" said Ned's particular enemy, advancing and leering savagely at the youth. "My name's Jim Scarlet, and I'm Robin Hood's right bower. You've been down on our band right along, and now we've got down on you, and we're goin' to show ye what we kin do when we take a notion."

"He seems fond of the water," said Hood; "suppose we give him a sail down the river."

The tree under which Hood was lying extended one branch over the stream a considerable distance, and at a sign from the outlaw one of his men now climbed into the tree and out upon this branch, carrying a rope in one hand.

A small flat-bottomed skiff was then shoved out from under the bank, and Ned was placed in it, two men holding him.

The man above lowered the rope, on the end of which was a noose, and when this was placed about Ned's neck and drawn snug, the other end was made fast to the branch above.

The boat was then pulled ashore by a line, and the two men sprang out upon the bank, the line being then cut and the boat allowed to drift.

As soon as it should get into the current the result was obvious.

Unless Ned could prevent it the stream would float it away, and he be left dangling from the branch.

If he attempted to leap from the boat the same result would follow.

Ned struggled to keep the boat balanced, and prevent it from reaching the current.

By moving his feet and getting in the bow he could for a time keep the head down, so as to prevent its getting into the running water; but it was only a matter of time, after all, and before long the boat would drift from under him and leave him hanging by the neck.

"For God's sake, Ainsley, release me, if you are human!" cried Ned, in agony, doing his utmost to keep the boat balanced.

"My name is Hood," answered the outlaw, coolly. "You are mistaken in the man."

"Are you, then, all that men believe you—a murderer, a pitiless savage, a man without conscience or remorse?"

"I am the Robin Hood of the West," returned the other, with a laugh. "This sort of thing is an experiment, as we have never tried it before, but I don't see but that it's going to work all right."

Then the outlaws, sitting in careless attitudes upon the bank, some smoking, some drinking, others playing cards on the grass, all laughed merrily, as if this was the funniest thing they had ever seen.

"Good-bye, Ned," laughed Scarlet. "Keep a warm place by the fire fur me when ye git down yander."

Despite all Ned's efforts, the boat was gradually moving out into the stream, and he had been obliged to shift his position to avoid being strangled.

His hands being secured, he could do nothing to help himself, and soon gave up the unequal struggle.

"Are you a demon, Ainsley, that you can conceive so diabolical a plot?" cried Ned. "For Heaven's sake shoot, and end this suspense!"

"Oh, it's too much fun for me to cut it short yet awhile," laughed Hood, coolly

lighting a black pipe and puffing away as unconcernedly as possible.

It could not last much longer, however, for Ned was now in the stern of the skiff, unable from exhaustion to keep it longer balanced.

It was gradually moving from under him, and already he felt the noose tightening around his neck.

The rope was just long enough to allow him to stand, for, if he had tried to throw himself into the bottom of the skiff, he would have been choked.

There was, therefore, no help for him if the boat floated away, and he was unable longer to keep it balanced.

"Ha, ha! We will soon have the second thing on the bill," laughed Hood, puffing away. "Don't keep us waiting, Ned. We've paid our dust, and we want to see the best of the show."

Ned feels the boat slipping, slipping, slipping; feels the noose gradually tightening; begins to lose consciousness, and yet, in the midst of his peril, breathes a prayer for life.

"Oh, God! save me!" he cries in agony. "Let me not die when life is yet so pleasant!"

Suddenly there comes an interruption to their merriment.

A quick, sharp, whip-like report sounds upon the air.

A bullet is heard to whistle through the air, and a puff of smoke is seen to issue from the trees on the opposite bank of the river.

The outlaws seize their weapons and leap to their feet in an instant.

It is not at them, however, that the shot has been fired.

The rope about Ned's neck, now drawn tight, has been struck squarely by the flying bullet.

It cuts through three strands, and the tension parts the last.

The boat glides away, but Ned has fallen into the bottom.

The outlaws run along the bank in the endeavor to stop it, but the current has caught it now and borne it beyond their reach.

"Just my luck!" growls Hood, with an oath. "Cheated out of my prey just at the last moment."

A bullet passing through the crown of his slouched hat and narrowly missing his head cut short his meditations and reminded him of his danger.

He quickly sprang behind a tree, as his comrades had done, and a volley was now fired at the opposite bank, although there was no mark at which to aim.

Meanwhile, Ned, whose fall had loosened the noose about his neck, arose, still somewhat stunned, and looked about him.

He was too far away from the outlaws to render a shot practicable, and for some reason, also, they had suddenly disappeared, not a sign of them being seen.

Suddenly, however, he became aware of a new danger.

He heard a roaring sound ahead of him, felt the boat moving more swiftly, looked at the waters, and saw that the current had greatly increased in speed.

Below him, now not more than a hundred yards away, were the rapids!

He would be dashed over them and killed on the sharp rocks at the bottom.

Throwing himself flat upon his face in the bottom of the skiff, he held his breath and awaited the awful moment which should decide between life and death.

CHAPTER IV.

THE boat, with nothing to guide or stay its course, was swept along on the rapid current, and swiftly approached the falls.

To be swept over the rapids was a frightful thing to contemplate, for there were ten chances to one against a man's coming out alive.

As the light skiff was swept resistlessly onward, the poor fellow scarcely dared breathe, expecting every moment would be his last, and yet hoping against hope.

Suddenly the boat seems to be lifted in the air, and Ned clings as tightly as he can to the bottom, although in his helpless condition he can do but little.

Then the skiff gives a rush, and, balanced for an instant on the very crest of the waters, shoots downward with the greatest rapidity.

There is a plunge and a shock, a combination of sounds, a rush of waters, a sharp pain in his head, and then Ned becomes unconscious, everything growing black before

him, and then a blank rests upon his mind, which it is impossible to remove.

How long this continues he does not know, but at last he becomes dimly conscious of lying on a soft bank in the warm sunlight, with some one bending over him, endeavoring to bring him to consciousness.

He soon recovered, and looking up fancied that he saw in the face of the man bending over him a resemblance to Tom Ainsley.

Again in the power of that villain, he thought, and overcome by weakness, he fell back insensible.

When he again recovered it was with a confused sensation of having heard the noise of a struggle, the sound of pistol shots and the loud talking of men evidently engaged in a fight.

He felt stronger, and sitting up, found himself in a rude hut, through the open door of which he could see trees, the shimmer of a stream and a view of distant hills.

"What place is this, I wonder?" he muttered to himself, as he got up and walked toward the door.

The hut was situated in a little green, and not far away was a running stream, the sound of men's voices being distinctly heard borne on the summer breeze, and he had no doubt that the men were miners at work.

He walked cautiously toward the stream, being concealed by the trees at first, but presently, reaching more open ground, and catching sight of the men at work, he dropped upon the grass and made his way with more care, lest he should be discovered.

As he drew nearer he perceived a number of men sitting on the bank whom, at first sight, he had taken for irregularities in the ground, on account of the green suits they wore.

Their movements dispelled this illusion, and then he realized that he was still a prisoner among his former enemies, the outlaws.

He recognized some of them, but could see nothing of Hood himself, or Tom Ainsley, as he now believed the man to be without a doubt, the latter being seated on the bank watching the men at work.

Ned crept back carefully until the trees screened him more completely, and then began making his way down stream, as it was in that direction that the mining camp lay.

Presently a bend in the river hid him from sight, and keeping the trees between him and the men at work, he hurried along as quickly and as noiselessly as possible.

Presently, however, he came to a deep ravine or gully, which set in from the river, at the bottom of which there was a tumbling stream.

His retreat was thus cut off, for the gully was too wide to cross, its banks being almost perpendicular as well, so that there was no chance of climbing down and getting over the stream at the bottom.

Ned made his way along the bank for some little distance, however, hoping to find a place where the bank was less precipitate, or where he could get around and so reach the opposite side.

This only brought him back to the hut again, however, as there were other gullies, some of them quite deep, which turned him from his course and brought him back to his original starting place.

Vexed and annoyed at his non-success, the poor fellow again entered the hut and threw himself upon the rude bed it contained, giving way to his feelings of disappointment in muttered sentences.

"They knew I could not get away, and so left no one to guard me. What do they intend to do with me, anyhow? Will they again attempt my life? If I have half a chance I'll fix some on 'em so they won't get over it in a hurry. But I s'pose they'll take me at an advantage and try to get the best of me."

He mused awhile in this strain, when suddenly the doorway was darkened, and looking up, he saw one of the outlaws standing before him.

"Well, what do you want?" he asked in no pleasant tone.

"That's not a very cordial way to greet your host," said the man, whom Ned now recognized as Hood himself.

"Oh, it's you, is it? Well, I can only repeat my question—what do you want?"

"Thought you could get away, didn't you? Found it was of no use?"

"I certainly didn't do it this time," returned Ned, sourly; "but that isn't saying I

won't do it the next. What have you got to say?"

"Will you join our band?"

"No, I won't; and when I get out of this I promise you that I'll do all I can to run you down, and rid the country of the whole ruffianly lot of ye."

"Maybe you don't know that all your movements are watched, and that my men are placed all about our little retreat, and that if you had examined some of the trees and bushes more closely, you would have seen that they were men instead. I only tell you this to show you how utterly useless it is for you to try to get away."

"Thank ye. I'll look sharper the next time and profit by the suggestion."

"You'd better take my advice and be one of us, for otherwise you will never leave this place alive."

"If I joined you I'd get away the first chance I got and blow the whole business to the miners, and that isn't my sort. I'm square, I am, and I ain't going to try no such dodges; but if I can I'll get out of here, and then—look out for yerself, that's all."

"You're spunky, anyhow, and that's just what I like about you. The men wanted to put you through at once, but I told em to wait a bit and perhaps you'd join us. You've got till to-morrow morning to make up your mind."

Hood then went away, and an hour later Ned was brought a supper consisting of broiled bear-steak, corn bread baked in the hot coals, and a tin cup containing strong, hot coffee, without milk, of course, but slightly sweetened.

The young fellow did full justice to the meal, clearing away every scrap, for he was determined to keep up his strength, and knew that he could not do this without food.

Night came at last, and Ned waited for an opportunity to escape, but the door was securely barred, and three men paced steadily around the hut all night, the guard being relieved every two hours.

Seeing that it was out of the question of escaping that night, he stretched himself out and slept soundly, never waking until he was aroused by one of the outlaws, and, getting up, found that the sun was already two hours high.

"Come," said the man, gruffly, "we've got business with ye."

He was a powerful fellow, and Ned was but a child in his grasp, and seizing the young man he dragged him outside, where two other ruffians pounced upon him and hurried him towards the bank.

A rope already dangled from an overhanging branch, and as Ned was hurried forward, two men placed the noose about his neck and drew it snug, two others laying hold of the end and making ready to haul away.

Ned had not been bound, so great was the hurry of the Men in Green; but that might not avail him anything, for with a rush he was suddenly shot up into the air several feet.

Two shots suddenly rang out from some unknown quarter, and the two men holding the rope dropped dead, one of the men—the big fellow—falling across the slack of the rope, and preventing it from slipping.

The outlaws fled in haste; but there was Ned still hanging in mid-air, so that really his situation was no better than before.

CHAPTER V.

NED was not bound when he took that sudden flight in the air, and his first thought being that of self-preservation, he threw up one arm, and fortunately seized the rope.

This took off some of the strain upon his neck, though he was still very nearly strangled.

At the sudden flight of the outlaws he was left hanging, the body of the big ruffian lying across the rope, serving to keep Ned balanced in the air.

The young fellow quickly threw up his other hand, and grasping the rope firmly, removed the pressure on his neck.

Then, hanging by one hand, having taken a tighter hold upon the rope with the other, he succeeded in loosing the noose and casting it off his head.

Hand over hand he thus climbed up toward the limb, hoping to climb down by the trunk and so escape.

The extra tension on the rope, however, had caused it to pull out from under the body of the dead outlaw, and it now suddenly gave

way, letting Ned down with considerable rapidity.

Luckily for him he fell upon the back of the dead ruffian, and this broke the force of his fall, and beyond a general shaking up, no damage was done.

The outlaws had fled, but the men who had fired upon them were also not to be seen, a fact which, in the event of Ned having been bound, would have been a serious matter for the young fellow.

Ned lost no time, however, in idle wonder, but, possessing himself of the hat and weapons of the deceased man in green, hurried off toward the gully.

To his surprise he now saw that a tree had been felled so as to bridge the chasm, the upper surface being smoothed off with an ax, so as to make steadier walking.

Our hero needed no second invitation, and springing upon the improvised bridge, he hurried over, being as firm of foot when perched at this dizzy height as he would have been on the ground.

When half way over a shot was heard from the bank he had just left, and a bullet pierced the crown of his hat, passing uncomfortably near his head.

Quickly turning, Ned saw a green object just dodging behind a tree some ten feet from the bank.

It was doubtless one of the outlaws, who, returning, was endeavoring to prevent Ned's flight.

Quick as a flash the boy raised his rifle and fired.

The bullet struck the outlaw in the back, and he fell with a loud yell, Ned's quickness having been too much for him.

"Lucky I collared that dead feller's shooter," muttered he, as he sped on over the tree.

A perfect volley now flew after him, the shots rattling one after another like a discharge of crackers, and the bullets falling like hail all around him.

There had been no accurate aim taken, however, and although some of the shots passed disagreeably close to the brave boy, none of them injured him.

As he reached the opposite bank, Ned dropped to the ground behind a stump, and took a hurried survey of the situation.

The Men in Green, to the number of a dozen or more, have returned, and are flocking towards the gully in the hope of cutting off their late prisoner's retreat.

Ned has not taken his enemy's weapons without providing himself with ammunition, and he now quickly reloads the rifle, at the same time dropping his pistols where he can seize them at a moment's notice.

One of the outlaws rushes upon the narrow bridge, calling to his comrades to follow.

Crack!

The villain has not reckoned upon Ned's skill as a marksman.

The bullet strikes him plumb in the heart, he throws up his hands wildly, and topples over into the abyss below with a last shriek.

The outlaws, enraged at the death of their comrade, press forward, expecting to take Ned at a disadvantage, knowing that he cannot reload in time to stop them from crossing.

They know nothing of the boy's pistols, and one of them now speaks so effectively as to wound the foremost of the robbers and cause him to fall across the tree-trunk.

A second shot causes the next outlaw to stagger, lose his hold, turn wildly around and fall, knocking two of his comrades into the gully in his mad attempt to save himself.

There were other outlaws coming, but, suddenly springing out, Ned seized the end of the trunk, which had been detached from the stump, and giving it a violent swing to one side, sent it crashing into the gully just as one of the outlaws was about to set foot on it.

Then he quickly dodged behind his stump again, as the distance across the gully was not too wide for a bullet to carry, and he ran considerable risk in thus exposing himself.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

His enemies had taken advantage of the occasion to fire, and the tip of one of Ned's ears was taken off, though the boy did not know it until he felt the blood slowly trickling down his neck.

He reached the shelter of the stump without receiving further injuries, however, and then, keeping within its shadow, quickly retreated backwards, until he had placed a clump of trees between himself and the outlaws, when he arose and hurried on in the direction of the camp.

"It's very strange," he mused, "who could have rescued me from those brutes? Why didn't he show up again? It must have been he that felled the tree across the gully. Blow my buttons! I wonder if I cut off his retreat? That would have been a poor return for his kindness."

Convinced that the man, whoever he was, had escaped, the young fellow gave himself no further worry over the matter, but kept on his way, taking the precaution to reload his rifle, lest he might meet some unexpected enemy even yet.

His path, which was one over which he had never traveled, although he was tolerably acquainted with the country thereabouts, suddenly led him to the edge of a high but not particularly steep bank, it being easy for a practiced climber to make his way down without any great difficulty.

While he was looking for a good place to make the descent, a noise in the bushes to his right aroused him, and quickly turning in that direction, he saw a man just preparing to aim at him.

His own weapon was thrown to his shoulder in a second, and sheltering himself behind a tree, he called out:

"Take care, my friend; I can shoot as well as you kin, and p'raps better."

"I'm not so sure about that," returned the other.

"Hood again, as I'm a sinner!" ejaculated our hero in great surprise.

Both men discharged their weapons simultaneously.

Ned's bullet passed within an inch of Hood's head, the latter striking the tree behind which Ned was sheltered.

"A cluss shot both ways," muttered Ned, as he sprang out upon the outlaw, so as to prevent his firing again.

Hood leaped forth, evidently with the same intention, and in another moment both men had grappled, each trying to throw the other.

Ned was a wiry young fellow, and a good match for his opponent, who seemed more desirous of overpowering than of killing his enemy.

Our hero, however, used every effort to hurl his foe down the bank, dragging him toward it with all his might, and trying his best to throw him.

So fiercely did Ned exert himself that before long the two were on the very brink, where but one step would have sufficed to send them whirling down to the bottom.

Hood, seeing Ned's intention, suddenly drew himself back a step or two by a great exertion, and quickly disengaged one hand.

In a moment the little gold bugle at his side was placed to his lips, and a blast, long and loud, echoed and re-echoed through the forest.

It was presently answered by other blasts, and then by a chorus of shouts; and darting a quick glance among the trees, Ned directly saw a dozen figures gliding swiftly from tree to tree, which he knew at once to be the Men in Green.

"Blow my buttons if you get away after all!" he cried, and exerting all his strength, he threw both arms about his antagonist, lifted him bodily from the ground, and dashed toward the brink with him.

The outlaws saw the peril of their leader, and sprang forward in great haste, fearing to fire lest they should injure Hood, and yet most anxious to save him.

Ned did not pause a second on the verge, but sprang into the air, and in an instant both he and Hood had disappeared over the brink, the outlaws uttering cries of dismay and horror, pressing forward with the expectation of seeing the dead body of their leader lying crushed and bleeding on the rocks below.

CHAPTER VI.

THE next morning after Ned's disappearance there was considerable excitement in Nuggetville, particularly when it was known that he had had a dispute with a stranger in Sam White's saloon.

Sam himself offered to go with a party in search of the missing man, but as no one had any idea where he had gone, it was hard to tell where to look for him.

It was suggested that the mysterious outlaws might have attacked him, but as their haunts were not known, no one knew where to look for them.

During the day nothing was seen or heard

of him, and Cora, who was as anxious about him as any one, set off about the middle of the afternoon to go to his father's house to inquire if anything had been heard from him.

She was accompanied by a lad of ten or twelve years of age, the son of Jeff Ferguson, who knew the road, and went with her for protection's sake, though it was doubtful if he could do much in that line.

When about half way to Henderson's they met a rough-looking man on horseback, who said at once, without further parley:

"Be you the gal what's lately come to town? Ned Henderson got a fall from his horse last night, and he's stayin' up to my place, and sent me down to bring ye up to see him."

"Where is he?" asked the young girl, anxiously.

"'Bout a mile further, up a cross path. I knowed ye couldn't find it without me, so I comed to fotch ye."

"Who are ye, anyhow?" asked the lad.

"I never seed ye in town."

"Wall, that ain't strange, 'cause I don't come in once a month. I'm Jed Andrews, and I lives up country. Ned, he got runned away with and chucked down a gully, and 'twar nearer to my house than his'n, so I took him there."

"But you said you lived a mile——"

"So I do; but Ned he was senseless, and I couldn't tell who he was in the dark, so I thought best to take him to my cabin 'stead of anywhere else."

"I'll go with the young woman," said the boy, "'cause I don't know yer, and I was sent to look arter her, an' I'm goin' to do it."

"I ain't got no objection," returned Jed.

And accordingly the three passed on, presently turning down a narrow side-path before reaching Jed's cabin.

The path presently became so rough and so narrow that Jed suggested dismounting, but the boy said that if he had come that way on horseback, why couldn't they go over the same route in the same manner.

They continued, therefore, as before, and presently came to a rude bridge over a stream, across which Jed said they would have to lead the beasts.

Cora thereupon dismounted, and so did the boy; but he had no sooner done so when Jed hit him a sudden blow across the side of the head, and sent him sprawling into the water.

In another instant he had cut the young lady's horse a stinging blow across the flank with his whip and started him off on the back track with a snort of pain.

Then, before the young girl could realize what had happened, he leaned over in his saddle, being still mounted, seized her in his arms, and lifted her up in front of him in a twinkling, setting spurs to his horse, and dashed across the bridge in an instant.

When Ted, the boy guide, recovered from the first effects of his sudden cold bath, he floundered about, and then struck for the bank, reaching which he looked around for his late companion.

She had disappeared, and so had Jed, not a trace being left to show where either of them had gone.

Meanwhile Jed Andrews, as he called himself, had stifled Cora's cries by stuffing a coarse handkerchief into her mouth, and bidding her remain silent on pain of death.

The path suddenly turned at a saarp angle, and Jed, leaping quickly from his horse, sent the animal off in one direction while he took another, passing under a natural archway of rocks, and then down a little gully and across a tumbling stream upon a fallen tree, finally bringing up before the entrance of a rude hut, made by joining the tops of several saplings together, and filling in the spaces with creepers, over which twigs and branches had been laid.

Cora was placed inside this hut, and then her abductor blew a short blast on his bugle, which brought two or three men dressed in green to his side.

"So you've got the gal, have you?" they asked. "Have any trouble?"

"A little, but I didn't mind that."

Then he went away, and Cora was left alone to her thoughts, the light gradually fading away and night coming on without any one visiting her.

She managed to fall asleep, despite her troubles, but was awakened somewhere about midnight by a hand being placed over her face.

She was about to cry out when the hand

was pressed against her mouth, and a boy's voice whispered hurriedly:

"Sh! Don't make a noise. It's me—Ted. I'll get you out of this. Foller me, but don't say nothin', and stoop as much as ye kin."

It was the boy, Ted, who by dint of perseverance in the face of numerous failures, had at last discovered her hiding-place, and had come to take her away.

Cora obeyed the lad without question, feeling that he was to be trusted, and together they crept from the hut and made their way slowly, and with the utmost caution, towards the brook and its tree bridge.

At the other end of the glade could be seen a fire, and men passing to and fro, and once or twice a sentinel passed close to them and paused for a moment to listen.

At such times Ted made his companion lie flat on the ground, telling her in a smothered whisper when to arise, and cautioning her not to make any more noise than she could possibly avoid.

When they reached the little bridge Ted guided her safely across, cautioning her to stoop so as to avoid discovery, for the light of the fire shone most plainly upon this spot, and detection seemed imminent.

At last they were safely over, and then Ted led the way through the arch of rocks and along the path to the foot of a large hollow tree which Cora had noticed when she passed the road the day before.

"Ye're pretty well tuckered and it's a long way yet," whispered the boy, "so you'd better get into this tree and rest yerself."

Cora stepped into the hollow tree, and getting into a comfortable position quickly fell asleep, Ted crawling under a lot of dry leaves and moss and curling up for a nap, being really more in need of sleep than his comrade.

The night passed away, morning dawned, the woods were full of the songs of birds, the sun gradually lighted up the recesses of the forest, but still they slept on as though they could never get sufficient rest.

Higher and higher arose the sun, until its rays fell upon the hollow tree and penetrated to the interior, but still Cora slept, though its beams shone full in her face.

There is a sound of rapid footsteps, the report of fire-arms, loud shouts and the tramp of horses.

Ted starts from his sleep, throws off his covering of leaves, and springs to his feet.

"By gum! It's awful late!" he muttered. "I didn't think I'd slept so long. Gosh! we'll have to get out of here mighty sudden or we'll be nabbed."

His first thought was of flight, but then he considered that it would be best to remain hidden until the excitement had passed away.

He was about to caution the young girl to remain quiet when, of a sudden, she sprang out from her place of concealment with a cry of alarm.

"Sh!" said Ted, but at that instant he perceived that his caution had come too late.

Already their retreat had been invaded, and Cora was in the grasp of two of the Men in Green, while a third was making for Ted at full speed.

The boy started to run, but, catching his foot in a creeper, fell heavily to the ground, and before he could arise was seized and dragged to his feet by Jed, who shook him as though he was but a rat.

Others came up shortly, and among them was Hood himself, who smiled cruelly and ordered a retreat.

CHAPTER VII.

WHEN Ned leaped into the little gully with the outlaw in his arms, he fell into a stunted tree which grew out of the bank about half-way down, and so escaped severe injuries.

He was obliged to let go his hold upon Hood in order to save himself, and then dropped into the lower branches, and thence to the ground.

Leaping the little stream at the bottom, he ran along under the bank for some distance, so as to avoid the outlaws whom he knew would soon follow him.

He presently reached a point where he could ascend the bank without difficulty; and, taking care to keep himself well screened behind the rocks and trees, he hastily climbed to the top.

There was a narrow path near at hand, and down this he dashed, hoping to elude pursuit, but he soon heard the voices of the outlaws behind him, and among them that of

Hood, who was endeavoring to head him off.

Plunging through the thicket, he ran for some distance, and was congratulating himself on having escaped, when he came directly on a fresh party of his enemies.

Grappling with one of these, he prevented the others from firing, and at last getting behind a tree, he dashed the man into a thicket and sped away, followed by a dozen shots.

Though he knew it not, he passed within a few feet of where Cora lay hidden, and thus it was that the outlaws, coming that way directly afterwards, discovered the girl and made her a captive.

Ned soon came upon a path leading to his own cabin, and after dropping in there for a minute to see his father and arm himself, hurried down towards the camp to give the alarm and assure Cora that he was still safe.

When he reached Sam's, he found that Ted Ferguson, who had succeeded in making his escape from the Men in Green, had just arrived, and from him he learned that Cora had been twice taken by the outlaws.

Ted offered to take a party to the retreat of the villains, and there were plenty who were ready to volunteer as members of the expedition, so that in half an hour twenty good men, exclusive of our hero and Ted, well armed and equipped, were ready to start out in search of the young lady in whom they all felt so great an interest.

Ted proved a good guide, and led the party to the place recently occupied by the Men in Green.

The remains of the camp-fire were found, as well as the hut where our hero had spent one night, but this was all, and doubtless the outlaws had expected just such a visit, and had decamped.

There was a light skiff hidden away under the bank, which Ted Ferguson, spying about, presently discovered, after the party had given up all hope of finding the outlaws.

In fact, the greater part of them had departed to continue the search elsewhere, leaving Ned and Ted nearly alone.

It was agreed that Ned and the boy should ascend the river in the boat, those that had not already gone keeping along the bank.

Ned therefore got in and pushed off, Ted sitting in the stern and keeping a lookout ahead.

For some little time the men on the bank kept apace with the boat, but at length they were obliged to make a detour.

The rocks suddenly rose right up from the water's edge, leaving no room to pass around.

Tangled bushes and swampy places also interfered, and so the men pushed in from the river in order to get around these obstructions.

Then for a time the trees on either side arched their branches completely over the stream, shutting the boat from sight.

Ned rested his oars in the water so as to keep the boat from drifting, and looked about him.

A deep silence rested over all the scene. He could scarcely bring himself to speak.

"I don't see what has become of our comrades," he said, at length.

Indeed, it was more than an hour since they had parted company with the latter.

"Perhaps they didn't find it such an easy matter to get back to the river agin, arter leaving it."

"Maybe not."

"Or they may have struck another trail, and got onto the track o' the cusses in green clothes."

"Suppose we call to them? At the worst we can but bring the Men in Green down upon us, and we don't mind that."

Ted therefore stood up in the boat, and raising his boyish voice to its shrillest pitch, shouted with all his might:

"Hallo! Hal-loo-oo!"

Then came an answering voice, or rather a number of them.

"Hallo! Hallo! Hallo! Hallo-oo-oo!"

"Those are only echoes," said Ned.

"Jest the rocks and trees talkin' back?"

"That's all."

"Suppose I try ag'in?"

"All right."

Ted did try again, but although he made the air fairly resound with his shouts, there was no answer save that uttered by the mocking echoes.

"Mebby they've gin it up," the boy said, in disgust.

"What do you say, Ted? Shall we go back?"

"What's the good? We won't find 'em by turnin' round. Let's keep on, and mebbey we'll find suthin'. S'pose ye let me pull and you watch ahead."

Ted took the light oars, therefore, and pulled, Ned sitting in the stern and keeping a lookout.

The boy pulled for some little time amid the most perfect silence, Ned being occupied with his thoughts.

Suddenly, however, he guided the boat around a sharp turn in the river, and came at once upon an unexpected sight.

An old water-mill abandoned and half ruined.

There it stood on the bank, solitary and alone, like the wreck of a past age, a monument to the changed times.

The thirst for gold had invaded its territory, the mill-race had been dug up and changed from its course, the lumber interest had been neglected in the search for greater wealth, and the old mill was now idle.

"That must be Fraikes' mill," said Ned. "It used to do a good business till the gold fever struck the country."

It was indeed Fraikes' mill, but its owner and business had both disappeared with the changes wrought by the finding of gold, and now it was left alone, almost forgotten, and fast falling into ruins.

Ted turned, and gazed at the dilapidated structure.

"Dad has told me about Fraikes," he said; "but I never see the mill afore. I say!"

"Well?" for Ted had suddenly paused.

The boy's voice dropped to a whisper.

"Don't ye s'pose that them fellers—the Men in Green—would be likely to make a what-d'ye-call-'em, a rendyvoo, of this yer place?"

"Perhaps. Suppose we look."

Then pulling ahead a few strokes, the boat was landed at the bank, and the two comrades approached the old mill, standing there, grim, silent and deserted.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE part of the mill where Ned and Ted intended to enter was the rear, near the base of the fall from the sluice.

As the wheel was stopped, the water came out considerably to one side of it, over a sort of dam, and fell into the river below with a roar.

The lower part of the mill was, of course, on a level with the bank, where Ned and his comrade had landed, but if one wished to continue along it he would be obliged to go to the top of the mill.

The building was built of coarse planks, some of which had fallen or been torn away, and the interior of the mill could be plainly seen.

The wheel was broken in places, the water slowly dripping from it as it overflowed the buckets, the sluice above not being entirely dry.

The boat had been secured to a tree so that it might not float away; and, when the two explorers had seen all they cared to see on the outside, they determined to push their inquiries further.

The lower door, shaded by the bank, stood partly open, as though it was of little importance now whether it was open or shut.

This was but another indication of the utter desolation that had fallen upon the place.

"This was a busy place once," remarked Ned; "but blow my buttons off, if it is now."

Then he pushed the door in, the creaking of the rusty hinges sounding like a groan.

He and Ted advanced and looked about them.

A dilapidated work-bench, a pile of refuse planks, dust, green-mold, cobwebs and decay—that was all.

They ascended the rough stairs, which creaked and trembled under them, and reached the floor above.

Here the air entered freely at the broken windows—there wasn't a whole pane in any of the sashes, and some of these latter were missing entirely—and the same desolation pervaded the place that had been apparent below.

From a beam overhead, covered with dust and blue mold depended a rope, looking like a noose; and, indeed, it seemed a fit place for a suicide.

There was another room beyond this, but the door leading to it had fallen down, and

they could easily see through and out upon the ruin beyond.

"There are certainly no hiding-places here," mused Ned, "and I reckon we've made a mistake."

There was one more story to be examined, and the two ascended the rough, narrow flight of rickety steps leading to it.

Here were the saws and other machinery of the mill, all covered with rust and dust, and motionless.

At one side a large window looked out upon the stream, and near it was a trap leading to the sluice-way.

An immense log lay near the window, and on the floor were scattered chips and sawdust, as though the place had but recently been vacated.

"Tain't likely any one comes yer," declared Ted, looking around. "Look at the roof; it's all holes, and the fust good rain-storm would drench 'em."

"There's nothin' here, my boy. But, I say, it strikes me that you must be hungry, for I am."

"Gosh! I never thought about it before; but it must be late, for the sun is on his way down hill."

It was now afternoon in fact, but so occupied had they both been, what with pulling up stream, and what with exploring the old mill, that the hours had passed by unnoticed.

Both had fire-arms with them, and it would therefore be easy enough to find sufficient food in the woods.

Half a dozen paces from the mill brought them into a perfect wilderness, and once out of sight of the ruin, one would not have supposed that there was a dwelling within ten miles.

There was an abundance of game—wild turkeys, pigeons, hare and rabbits, and bears, too, if they cared to look for them.

In twenty minutes they had each bagged enough to last them all day.

Descending to the lower bank, they selected a dry, sandy spot on which to build their fire, and before long a cheery breeze enlivened the loneliness and added life to the scene.

There was plenty of dry wood about, and Ted busied himself collecting this, while his older comrade prepared half a dozen fat birds and a brace of rabbits for cooking.

Water there was in abundance, but as they had neither coffee nor anything to cook it in, nor bread nor the wherewithal to make it, there was, of necessity, not much variety to the bill of fare.

When the fire had burned down so that there was a considerable bed of glowing coals, Ned spread open his birds with a twig and laid them upon the fire to roast.

That he had not prepared too much was proven by the fact that he and Ted consumed every scrap, picking the bones as clean as though they had been in the fire.

Both felt drowsy after their hearty meal and the exercise they had taken, and as it was considered safe to go to sleep, preparations were made accordingly.

The boat was hauled in out of sight under the trees, and both Ned and his comrade, stretching themselves out upon the grass, soon fell into a doze.

Ned was the first to awake, and bearing a sound like the hum of voices, peered out upon the water.

There was not much light, but if he was not greatly mistaken, those were men that he saw passing—men in boats.

He drew nearer to the edge of the bank and peered out upon the water.

Yes, there were two boats, rowing slow and steady, and in them were men conversing in low tones.

He awoke Ted without making any unnecessary sound, and both watched the boats passing.

There were half a dozen of them in all, each containing from four to six men.

As the last one passed, the moon suddenly penetrated a bank of clouds which had before obscured it.

The whole scene was at once flooded with the silvery light.

The occupants of the boats were the outlaws.

The Men in Green!

"We must follow them!" Ned whispered, hoarsely.

The boat pushed out and both entered it, Ned taking one oar and Ted the other, pushing it gently along in the shade.

Fortunately they could see without being seen.

There, a few rods in advance, were the boats, all heading directly for the falls at the side of the mill.

Ned approached considerably nearer, expecting to see the men land and go into the old mill.

To his astonishment they continued straight on.

Straight for the falls.

While he was still gazing at them in wonder, the boats shot right up to the falls and one after another quickly disappeared right through the sheet of water.

CHAPTER IX.

"Did you see that, Ted?"

"Yes; and I don't believe them's real boats at all! They're ghosts, and the men is ghosts, too. Nobody could go slap into a fall o' water like that."

"They are men, my boy, beyond a doubt, for there are no ghosts now, if there ever were any; and if they can get through the falls I can."

"Gosh! Are ye going to try it?"

"Blow my buttons—yes! Those are the Men in Green, and they have some secret hiding-place under or in the old deserted mill. It is there they have carried Miss Cora, and I'm going to discover where it is."

Ned took the oars, and Ted guided him towards the falls.

The outlaws had all disappeared.

There was, therefore, no danger of their being discovered.

Ned glanced over his shoulder presently, and saw that he was headed right.

"There's probably only a thin sheet of water there," he explained, "and beyond is some cave which they inhabit."

"Then it must be under the mill?"

"Yes; but separate from the water-way."

Ted kept the boat steady, and Ned threw all his weight upon the oars.

The little craft fairly flew through the water.

It was headed straight for the falls, and was soon within a few feet of them.

Like an arrow the boat shot ahead right for the foaming waters.

Like a flash it dashed into the falls, the foam and spray flying all around.

Ned suddenly felt a cold shiver run all through him.

His ears were filled with strange sounds, his head seemed spinning around, and he was utterly overwhelmed.

The boat seemed sinking beneath him, and then all of a sudden it was shot violently backwards, and he fell forward upon his face.

When he picked himself up he found the boat, half full of water, floating on the river in front of the falls.

He had gone through them, and been driven out again by the force of the current.

It was a mercy they had not both been drowned.

"Well, that wasn't the right way, I reckon," sputtered Ned. "Gosh! I thought I was drowned."

"But the oars, Ted?"

"Oh, I've got them. I froze on to 'em when you let go of 'em. You see I was out fust, and I picked them up as they floated by."

"What are we going to do next?"

"Bail the water out and try it again."

"Run into the falls again, Ted?"

"No, you bet I won't. It's a wonder we wasn't drowned. What I mean is, try again to find the way them Men in Green went."

"Then you don't believe that they are ghosts after all?"

"No, siree, I don't."

The boat was quickly pulled to the bank again, and bailing was begun.

They had only their hats to work with, but nevertheless made good progress.

After awhile they were able to lift the boat upon its side and pour the water out.

Then they put it afloat again, and wiped the bottom with moss and grass to make it dry.

The next thing to do was to wring their clothes, which were wringing wet.

There was no very great hurry, however, as doubtless the Men in Green would not leave for some time.

There was enough of the old fire to kindle a new one from, though it was built somewhat further back from the bank, so as not to be visible from the river.

The fire was soon blazing away cheerily, and by this the two adventurers speedily dried their clothes, having first wrung as much of the water out of them as possible.

They were left hanging on the bushes, however, while Ned looked after their weapons.

These had been dampened somewhat by the ducking they had received, and would have to be cleaned.

Ned's powder-horn, however, had kept out the wet, and its contents were as dry as before the ducking.

"It's lucky we're no worse off," he said, pleasantly. "Our rifles will have to be cleaned, but we can't stop to do it now."

The two weapons were left standing against a tree near the fire, and then both the young fellows donned their garments.

They had knives at any rate, and they were not certain that they would have to use any weapons.

They stepped into the boat, the fire having been covered over so that it might not burn up and betray them, and once more they pulled for the falls.

Instead of rushing straight for them, they skirted along the edge of them.

They passed to the end, and here the wall of the mill arose abruptly before them.

Between it and the edge of the sheet of water there was, however, a space of about four feet.

Ned ran the boat as close to this as he could go.

Then he made a new discovery.

The boat could be shot under, if not through the falls.

There was a space, fully six feet in width, from the wall to the spot where the falling water struck the river.

Into this space he quickly guided the boat.

As he did so, it was whirled half around, and shot into a dark passage, leading apparently under the mill.

Ted pulled easily, and they presently emerged into a little basin shut in by stone walls.

Through several chinks in these the moonlight entered.

They now saw, drawn up alongside some stone steps, half a dozen boats, each fastened to a ring set in the stone.

This, then, was the retreat of the Men in Green.

The boat was drawn up close to one of the others, and making it fast, they stepped out upon the hard floor.

"If they see the boat, even, they won't suspect anything," said Ned, "for it's one of their own and just like the others."

Up the steps and along the passage went the two intruders cautiously, Ned taking the lead and listening for the slightest sound.

There was only one direction they could take, and therefore they could not go astray.

Presently they were brought to a halt by a door which stood right across their path.

Ned pressed upon this, intending to push it gently ajar, for he heard voices on the other side, and suspected that those he wanted were there.

Hardly had he laid his hand on the door, however, when it suddenly fell inward with a crash.

He was precipitated into a large, vaulted cavern, brilliantly lighted, and into the midst of an assembly of the Men in Green!

There they were, fifty or more in number, and at their head, seated on a raised platform in front of a small wooden table, sat Hood himself, while beside him was Cora Ainsley!

CHAPTER X.

THE surprise of Ned Henderson at finding himself suddenly precipitated into the presence of the Men in Green can better be imagined than described.

He was also astonished at seeing Cora evidently on such good terms with the outlaw chief.

He, however, had never been really satisfied that Hood and Tom Ainsley were the same, notwithstanding the former's evasive answering.

He might now be able to divine the question, though he would much rather have done so under different circumstances.

The outlaws sprang to their feet upon his sudden entrance, and made a rush towards him.

"Seize the spy!" yelled Hood.

Ned had nothing but a knife with which to defend himself, and this he quickly drew and turned himself into a defiant attitude.

"Come on, one or even two at a time, and I'll face you!" he cried.

"Save yourself!" cried Cora. "Fly from this spot—these men are robbers!"

"Silence!" hissed Hood, turning fiercely upon the brave girl.

Ned turned to fly, hoping to bring assistance later.

The Men in Green had surrounded him, however, and his retreat was cut off.

Several of them had got behind him while he stood facing Hood.

As he turned he saw that the door had been shut once more, and his enemies stood in front of it.

"Stand aside!" he cried, brandishing his knife as he advanced.

But the Men in Green stood firm.

Each had a heavy pistol in his right hand. Ned looked around him in search of Ted.

The outlaws evidently knew nothing of his having been there.

He had therefore been allowed to escape.

This might prove an advantage to Ned, as the boy was shrewd and sharp, and would bring assistance if he could not otherwise effect his friend's escape.

"Yield," said Hood, at this moment, "and no harm shall come to you. Resist, and you die."

Ned turned and faced the chief of the outlaws.

Then he uttered a sudden cry of astonishment.

Cora had disappeared most mysteriously, and yet there did not seem to be any door, save that by which he had himself entered so unceremoniously.

"I am in your power," said Ned, "but I shall not yield till you tell me what you have done with that young lady."

"She is safe, and will not be harmed."

"What are your intentions concerning her?"

"I intend to make her my wife!"

Then the man was not Tom Ainsley, after all.

"What! You are her brother!" cried Ned, determined to force the man into a confession of his identity.

"I am Robin Hood, the outlaw," said the other with a laugh. "Men in Green, seize the prisoner."

The outlaws suddenly closed in upon the young miner, and, despite his resistance, he was quickly secured and bound hand and foot.

He was then placed upon a rough bench in the center of the underground apartment, the outlaws sitting in a circle around him.

The place was lit by oil lamps, put up at intervals around the walls, and by their smoky, flickering, uncertain light Ned watched the outlaws, studying each face alternately, that he might remember it again.

The men wore no masks, nor did they seem to object to this close scrutiny, which they could not but notice.

That they had done so was evident by a question presently put by the leader.

"Do you think that you would know any of us again, should you meet us?" he inquired, with a short laugh.

"Yes—all of you."

"Then you evidently hope to again escape us?"

"I am certain of it."

"You should never be certain of anything—except death," the last two words being spoken after a pause and with another dry laugh.

"Being certain of that, you and your men ought to change yer ways. There's sech a thing as law, even in these yer wilds—Lynch law, if ye know what that is."

"We have a law of our own," retorted Hood, angrily, "and we're going to give you a taste of it. Order, gentlemen!"

The place then became as still as the grave.

"Prisoner at the bar," said Hood, who seemed to be judge, counsel on both sides, jury and everything else combined, "listen to the charge."

"Go on."

"You are accused of attempting to break up our band and bring its members to what you call justice."

"You have also attempted to take from our custody a certain young lady."

"And have endeavored to fathom all our secrets, with the intention of delivering us up to your companions."

"If you had weapons in your hands at this

moment, you would kill all within your reach.

"If given your freedom, you would not oppose to seek or harm us?"

"Men in green," continued Hood, "you hear the admissions of the prisoner. What say you? Is he guilty or not guilty?"

"GUILTY!"

So spoke every man present in deep, full tones.

"And his sentence is——"

"DEATH!"

"You hear?" asked Hood, with a wicked smile.

"Oh, I ain't astonished at anything you do. I was ready for that."

"Men in Green, the prisoner makes no appeal. When shall the sentence be executed upon him?"

"Now!"

"And the means of his death?"

Scarlet arose, and with a leer upon his ugly face, said:

"It's given out that this yer place is haunted, but there ain't no real live ghost yet; so I say we take this yer young feller up above, stick him on a log, and saw him inter slabs. Then if he haunts the mill, he'll have to do it in pieces."

For an instant Ned felt a cold shudder run through him.

Then he recovered himself by an effort, and looked calmly around upon the grinning outlaws.

"Blindfold him," said Hood, "and lead the way above."

Ned's eyes being tightly bandaged, he was lifted up by four of the outlaws and carried from the place, but in what direction he could not see.

Presently he was placed upon his feet, and the bandage taken from his eyes.

He was in the upper part of the mill, where was all the machinery lately used by the legitimate occupants.

The moon shone brightly in through the open space at the side, showing the water glistening in the silvery light, the trees, the opposite bank, and everything just as Ned had seen it the afternoon previous.

Nothing but the roaring of the falls outside broke the stillness.

The moon was quite low now, and Ned knew that morning could not be far distant.

Who would hear his cries for help in this wilderness?

Who would know whether the mill was going again or not?

Where was Ted all this time?

Could he return in season to be of any use?

All these questions Ned asked himself as he saw the outlaws busily making preparations for carrying out their horrible intentions.

The huge log he had seen before was lifted and placed on the slide, the sluice-way was opened, the wheel set in motion, much to Ned's surprise, the saw well greased and everything made ready for the fearful scene they had all come to witness.

CHAPTER XI.

Yes, the old mill, so long abandoned, was once more running.

The wheels revolved with a terrible noise and splashing, the water rushed into the sluice, and the overflow at the fall was for the moment stopped.

How the foam did dash and glimmer in the moonlight, how the startled echoes did repeat the sounds they had not heard for so long a time!

"Slap him on to the log and start her up," said Hood.

Ned would have screamed at these words, but he had been gagged, and could not utter a sound.

He was seized and thrown upon his back upon the great log, his feet toward the saw, and was then bound securely with ropes.

Then the saw was set in motion.

To die now was horrible enough, but death in this horrible fashion made him mad to contemplate.

There was no one but his boy Ted who could aid him, and it was impossible that he could bring help at this distance in time to save his friend.

"Set her to going!" cried Hood.

Scarlet pressed down a lever, and the log began to move, rapidly at first and then more slowly.

The saw had struck the log, and the noise was terrible.

Such a screaming, whizzing and buzzing had not been heard in that place for many a day.

Screaming, whizzing, buzzing, groaning, creaking and screaming, the saw tore through the huge log, and the sawdust fell in great piles below.

The outlaws stood looking on with the most eager interest.

And all this time the log was moving on, drawing Ned nearer and nearer to his fate.

The log is sawed one-third of its length, and the saw is now within a few inches of his feet.

It will cut between them, and then go slashing into his quivering body.

Ned's brain fairly reels at the thought.

A few seconds and all will be over.

Suddenly there comes an unexpected interruption.

There is a harsh, grating, grinding sound, and the saw seems to scream as if in agony.

Then it suddenly stops.

Several of its teeth are broken.

"Stop her!"

The belts are thrown off, and the saw stops.

The log is pushed back, so that an examination can take place.

The saw struck a huge spike driven into the log.

The damage had been tremendous, the saw being nearly split in two, nearly half of its teeth broken and the shaft blades twisted.

"Turn the water off," said Hood; "we can't do anything."

In a few moments the big wheel ceased to revolve, the water ran over the falls as before and everything resumed its wonted aspect.

How had the spike got there, and why had it not been discovered?

Accident had placed it there and concealed it as well.

It was a lucky accident for our hero, and he could not but be grateful for this intervention of Providence in his behalf.

"Take him away!" growled Hood, "and the next time we intend to have an execution we'll see that everything is in good working order."

The ropes were cut and Ned was placed upon his feet.

Crack!

A figure suddenly sprang into the mill by the little door leading out upon the upper bank.

Ned fell heavily to the floor.

So did one of the outlaws who had been supporting him.

Crack!

Another shot rang out upon the stillness. The bullet whistled within an inch of Hood's head.

It struck a man behind him in the temple and felled him to the floor—dead!

"Come on, boys! Clean out the hull gang!"

So cried a shrill voice—that of the strange figure that had suddenly appeared in the old mill.

"A rescue!" cried Hood. "Scatter, my Men in Green!"

"There won't be much to rescue, I reckon!" growled Scarlet. "Seems as how the cuss is dead!"

But Ned was not dead, having only fallen in a faint, the result of the reaction caused by finding himself suddenly snatched from death at a time when he believed his last moment had come.

It was the outlaw beside him that had been shot and not he.

The Men in Green, thinking that they were attacked by a large force, suddenly disappeared in all directions.

In two minutes the room was entirely cleared.

In five not a single Man in Green was to be seen about the old mill, save only those who had been shot by the attacking party.

And of what did this consist?

Of one small boy armed with two rifles and a brace of pistols.

Ted!

Yes, it was Ted, and he alone, that had routed the outlaws.

That call to his comrades to follow him was but a ruse, and the outlaws, suddenly surprised when they least expected it, and fearing that a large force was about to attack them, had been deceived by one small boy, and had incontinently fled.

Ted did not intend to wait until they had recovered from their surprise, however.

He at once fired all his remaining shots,

and with a loud yell dashed towards the spot where he had last seen Ned.

It was the work of a couple of minutes to cut the ropes that bound him, to ascertain that he still lived, and then to get him on his feet.

"What's the matter?" asked Ned, reviving and clutching at the boy for support.

"Don't stop to ask no questions, but get out o' here as soon as ye kin. Them robbers may come back afore we know it."

"You have brought help?"

"Nobody, only myself; but I reckon I gin 'em a scare fur all that."

"Then you are alone?"

"Yes, yes, but I tell ye we must git out o' here, or the durned curses may come back, and all I've done will be spilt and hev to be done over again."

CHAPTER XII.

THE two comrades lost no time, after this, in getting out of the mill, though Ted did stop and pick up the rifles and ammunition of the dead outlaws.

Ned took his share of the load, however, and then they both hurried out along the bank and into the thicket.

"Let's go down and stop where we made the fire this afternoon," said Ted, leading the way.

Ned said no more, and in a few minutes they reached their little encampment, and Ned sat down on a stump, his companion taking a fallen log.

The first signs of day now began to appear, the moon growing paler and the songs of birds beginning to be heard in the woods.

"Now, Ted, tell me all about it."

"Well, when you tumbled with that door, right slap inter the middle of the gang, I knowed suthin' was up, and I dusted."

"I thought they was no use o' my gettin' cotched, too; so I clared out, and hid in the dark, but bumbye I sneaked back and listened at the door, though I didn't darest to tech it, fur fear it would fall down and let me in like it had you."

"When I knowed they wasn't goin' to do nothin' to ye down thar, I slipped away, got inter the boat and made off as tight as blazes fur our camp."

"We had left the rifles standin' again' a tree; so I jest took and cleaned 'em as smart as I could, loaded 'em up, and after hidin' the boat set out fur the old mill."

"I war s'prised to see the wheel agoin', fur I thought as how it wouldn't work no more, and so I knowed that they was danger ahead, and I jest pulled up stakes fast as I knowed how."

"When I got outside the door on the top story, the saw was buzzin' and screechin' at a awful rate, and I 'spected nuthin' but that you was bein' sawed up by them wretches."

"I got as clust as I dared, and was goin' to pop over old Robin Hood hisself, when the saw gin a awful yelp, split a lot o' its teeth, and stopped."

"Then I thought what a fool I was not to have stuck a spike in the log my ownself, for I knowed what had happened right away."

"Anyhow, it was darned lucky, fur even if I had shot some on 'em, I couldn't have stopped the saw in time, and that was what wanted to be done."

"Wull, it wur stopped, and that was enough fur me; so I jest made up my mind to give them fellers a scare."

"I had both guns, so I plugged away fust with one and then with t'other and down came two birds."

"I thought I'd shot you, so I sung out lively and run in thar, blazin' away agin and scatterin' them greenies like sheep."

"That's all there is to it, 'cause when I knowed ye was still alive I thought the best thing to do was to get out, and so I got, and here we are."

The sky by this time had begun to grow lighter, the songs of the birds much louder, and all nature put on a fresher, brighter air to welcome the new day.

"Hadt we better get away from this yer?" asked Ted, after a pause of some minutes' duration.

"No; for, believing me dead, the outlaws will not be looking for me, and thinking, also, that their enemies are prowling about, will not venture to leave the mill for some time yet."

"Mebbe they've got some other way o' gettin' out?"

"I hardly think so; though, of course, we do not know. At any rate, I do not want to desert Miss Cora, and I am sure there is nothing to fear from them at present, for you can be sure that they won't appear until they think the coast is clear."

"That's so; and I don't want to leave the young woman with 'em, nuther."

"Then let's have breakfast."

There was plenty of the game left that they had shot the day before, and Ned prepared this for cooking, while the boy was making ready for the fire.

The breakfast was soon broiling over the glowing coals, the cooks meanwhile freshening themselves by a wash in the river, returning in time to prevent their breakfast from burning.

When this had been done to a turn, they fell to with keen appetites and devoured all but the bones, cleaning the latter better than the hungriest dog in the world could have done.

"Gosh! that is just the bulliest breakfast I ever eat," exclaimed Ted, wiping his mouth on his shirt sleeve when he had picked the last bone clean.

"Now, what do you say to going into the old mill again and see what we can find?"

"If you're goin', I'll go, too. Do you mean the lower story, where we went last night?"

"No, not there; that might be too dangerous, but the mill itself."

"Oh! Well, I don't know but that 'id be all right."

"Then show me where the boat is, for we might want to get at it in a hurry."

Ted accordingly led the way to where he had hidden the boat, and, getting in, the two shoved off, and rowed almost to the lower door of the old mill.

There they landed, tied the boat, and ascended the bank with as little noise as possible.

The place seemed entirely deserted.

When they reached the top, however, Ned, looking in at the door, gave a start, and uttered a low cry of surprise.

There, at the further end, standing by the large opening and looking upon the waters, sparkling in the sunlight, was a female figure.

It was Cora Ainsley, beyond a doubt.

She heard the sound, and turned quickly around.

"Ned!"

It was she indeed, and in a moment she came running to our hero.

"Cora—my own!"

In a moment the two were clasped in a loving embrace.

"Then you were not killed?"

"No; I escaped as by a miracle."

"And you have come to save me?"

"Yes; where are the outlaws?"

"Below somewhere. They brought me here not long ago, and I was standing there enjoying the view and breathing the fresh air, when I heard your step. I knew it at once."

"Come away, dearest; we must waste no time, for we know not at what moment the outlaws may return."

"Take me from them; I hate the sight of them."

"Is your brother Tom really one of them?" Ned asked, as he hurried toward the bank.

"I am puzzled about it. Sometimes I think he is, and sometimes not. They call him Hood, and yet it sometimes seems—"

"Make tracks!" screamed Ted at that moment. "Here comes the Men in Green!"

At that instant they had reached the door. Ned seized Cora in his arms and leaped upon the bank.

Below were three Men in Green, who at that second had caught sight of the fugitives.

In a moment a shrill blast of a horn awoke the echoes.

In ten seconds they would be surrounded.

"This way!" whispered Ted. "We'll take the boat!"

Down the steep bank they hurried, Ned carrying Cora in his arms.

They reached the boat, leaped in, shoved off, Ned seized the oars and away they went, gliding over the water.

A score of the Men in Green stood on the bank near the mill, gesticulating angrily.

"Come back here!"

"Not if I know it!"

Away pulled Ned, while Ted guided him around the bend.

"Look out!" screamed Ted, suddenly, look-

ing back. "Pull for all ye're wuth! They're comin' arter us in the boats!"

CHAPTER XIII.

Ted's announcement was, indeed, too true. The outlaws were pursuing them in the boats.

As the boy spoke Ned looked up, still pulling lustily on the oars, and saw Hood in the bow of a boat manned by two sturdy fellows, pulling away for dear life.

Behind him were five others, each manned by two outlaws, with a third to guide them along the windings of the current.

Besides the boats, the Men in Green had taken other means to bring back the run-aways.

Running along either bank were ten or a dozen of the outlaws, shouting, gesticulating and making all sorts of hostile demonstrations.

One or two shots rattled over our hero's head, but the pursuers were evidently afraid of hitting the young lady, and they presently desisted from firing, contenting themselves with trying to intercept the fugitives by running along the bank.

Ned could, of course, see his pursuers, and could tell just how far away they were and what progress they were making—whether they were gaining or losing on him, and how fast they went.

"Come back here!" shouted Hood, angrily, as he urged his men to renewed efforts.

To this summons, Ned made no reply, except to bend upon his oars with renewed energy.

Ted, however, turned half around, and applying his thumb to his nose, twirled his fingers in the most exasperating manner at his pursuers.

At this a shot came whistling disagreeably close to his head.

"You had better let me steer," said Cora, quietly. "I understand it sufficiently."

"But you will be exposed to greater danger," returned Ned, anxiously. "You had better come and sit behind me in the bow."

"On the contrary, the stern is the safest place for me to sit."

"Why so?"

"Because they do not want to injure me, being resolved on my capture, and they will not fire if there is any danger of hitting me."

Then with a quiet smile, she beckoned Ted to give her the rope, and took her place in the stern, the boy sitting in front of her, Ned pulling away faster than ever.

The outlaws were evidently not prepared for this move, and they set up a howl of rage when they saw what had been accomplished.

They had particular reasons for not wishing to hurt the young lady, though they did not care whether the others were killed or not.

This move prevented them from firing, and they would therefore be obliged to rely entirely on the oars.

Ned's boat, being more lightly loaded than the others, would naturally have gone faster than the others, but, as there were two rowers in each of the others, each having two oars to pull, the respective speed of pursuers and pursued was more nearly equal.

"It's about nip and tuck," remarked Ted, looking back, "and them greenies is pullin' jest as hard as they kin. Gosh! you kin see the sweat rollin' off 'em in buckets."

Ned laughed and pulled faster than ever, and presently a bend in the river hid them from their pursuers.

"S'pose we take to shore," said Ted. "We've got beyond them fellows on the bank?"

"Not yet; the river is still the safest place. Steer straight along, Cora, for we can go over the shallow places much better than our followers."

By this move, which Cora at once adopted, a considerable stretch was gained upon the outlaws, who, when they again sighted the pursued party, were greatly chagrined at the discovery.

A sudden turn in the river brought them to a narrow gorge, not more than fifteen feet wide, where the water was unusually strong and deep.

The gorge was fully a quarter of a mile in length, a range of low foothills bordering the river on either side, beyond this point which Ned had noticed as he had rowed up the day before.

Once beyond this point, he might leave the boat and strike across the country to Nuggetville.

This last stretch, therefore, he determined to row with renewed speed.

The little boat shot ahead with the speed of a race-horse.

Crash!

What had happened?

Ned was thrown over upon his back, and Ted fell into the water.

They had run upon a sunken rock.

The bottom of the boat was stove in, and the water began to rush in like a flood.

Ned lost one of his oars, and the other was broken short off by coming in contact with a jagged rock.

In their haste, the fugitives had overlooked their danger.

At that moment the outlaws came in sight, pulling lustily.

Loud shouts arose from the boats as the men perceived what had happened.

Ted was struggling in the water, and the boat having already begun to sink, Cora threw herself out in order to prevent being drawn down.

At the next moment it sank, and Ned was precipitated into the rushing stream.

When he arose he had been carried some distance from his comrades.

The outlaws had come up with them, and were at that moment hauling them into the boats.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

The ruffians had fired upon Ned, and a bullet had hit him in the right shoulder.

For an instant he was powerless and sank beneath the flood.

Recovering himself by an effort, he presently struck out, and soon arose once more to the surface.

Looking around him, he saw that the boats had all disappeared.

He was alone in the river, battling with the current.

He tried to swim against it so as to catch a glimpse of the boats, but the effort exhausted him and once more he sank.

There was no place to land, the steep cliffs affording no resting-place, and yet, if he did not soon find some ledge upon which to crawl he would be drowned to a certainty.

He felt too weak to swim, and he did not dare to trust to the current carrying him out of the gorge.

He was suddenly carried over close to the left of the bank, almost against the cliff, and he quickly looked up to see if there was any place where he could make a landing.

No; the rocks arose sheer from the water to an enormous height without a break.

Suddenly, however, he discovered a means of salvation.

There was a sort of crevice in the face of the cliff, about two feet wide and three in depth, extending as high as he could see.

In this natural niche hung a ladder composed of creepers twisted together, with rounds of bark and lithe branches intertwined.

Ned's foot caught in one of the rounds of this singular ladder, which hung down considerably below the surface.

Throwing up his left hand, he clutched one of the rounds just above his head, and held on desperately.

The ladder stretched and creaked, and some of the lower strands began to give way.

With a desperate effort the poor fellow dragged himself from the water and ascended the swaying ladder for about a dozen rounds.

The lower part had now fallen away, and was carried down-stream, but where Ned clung it was stronger, and for the moment he was safe.

CHAPTER XIV.

THERE was Ned, clinging to a half-rotten ladder of vines and bark, which might at any moment give way beneath his weight and let him down into the river, hanging to the face of a perpendicular cliff and making his way up its precipitous sides, where he knew not, and yet forced to ascend.

Bracing his shoulders against the sides of the natural groove in which the ladder was suspended, and trusting no more of his weight than was barely necessary upon its rounds, he continued his perilous ascent.

At last, after half an hour's hard climbing, he paused at a point where the ladder seemed to be stronger than usual, and resting himself against the rock paused to regain his strength.

He judged that he had gone about one-

third of the distance from the river to the top of the cliff, and yet dared not look down in order to verify this for fear of getting dizzy.

After resting about fifteen minutes, and feeling his strength and coolness both returning he continued the ascent, finding fewer weak places in the ladder than before, and feeling proportionately relieved and encouraged.

He felt now, however, that he could trust more wholly to the ladder itself, and not so much to the natural shaft, and this took very much of the labor to which he had formerly been forced to subject himself.

He continued steadily ascending for fully half an hour, not rapidly, to be sure, but regularly, pausing but a moment on each round before he ascended to the next; and when he again stopped to rest, he found, upon looking up, that he had reduced the distance to be climbed much more than he supposed he had.

The air up here was fresh and bracing, and not too cold, the effect being to renew his strength much better than before, and enable him to work longer than he had done below.

After half an hour's rest Ned again renewed his ascent, determined not to pause again until he had accomplished the whole distance to be gone.

The ladder swayed more the higher he got, and at times there were dangerous places to be passed, where he needed all his wits about him; but he was resolved not to be beaten now, and his sturdy nature was only strengthened by renewed dangers.

Up and up he went, now and then glancing above him and feeling encouraged by seeing the summit fast drawing nearer.

At last he sees the top but a few yards above him, and now there is more need than ever of retaining his presence of mind.

Nerving himself, however, for the last effort, and keeping his brain clear for the end, he kept on, reached the top, staggered from the ladder to the level ground, and then fell flat upon his face on the sparse, dry grass, completely exhausted.

"Wall! I'll be stumped! Where the mischief did that young feller come from? Blowed if he mustn't ha' clumb the ladder all alone by himself. Wonder what fetched him yer! Couldn't be curiosity, 'cause no man ain't goin' to take sech a journey as that yer unless he's got a mighty satisfactory reason fur so doin', blowed if he is!"

The above was uttered by a tall, lanky, lantern-jawed, cadaverous-looking specimen of humanity, nearly seven feet in height, with a flaming red head and beard, and big, bony, paw-like hands, who had emerged from a little bark cabin some five minutes after our hero had come over the top of the cliff.

The man was dressed in a suit of buckskin, rendered almost black by dirt, grease, blood and other things too numerous to tell about; his head surmounted by a battered felt hat, and his nether limbs provided with rough, cowhide boots, the soles of which were fully an inch and a half thick and nearly nine inches in width, the length of the boot being something terrible to see.

He carried a heavy stick in his hand, armed at the end with a steel point, the head being knotted and gnarled, and as big as a man's fist—the whole forming a terrible weapon in the hands of a man such as this giant looked to be.

"Blowed if he ain't all tuckered out!" he said, as he lifted Ned from the ground as though he had been but a child, and bore him to the hut half hidden among the bushes and dwarfed trees which grew plentifully a little way back from the edge of the cliff.

Taking Ned inside, he laid him upon a low couch formed of grizzly bear skins, rubbed his temples with whisky, poured some of the same stuff down his throat, loosened the collar of his shirt, chafed his hands and speedily brought him to consciousness.

"Who are you?" asked Ned, opening his eyes, sitting up and looking around him.

"Me? Wall, I'm Bart Snowdin, I am, and this yer is my ranch. So you clumb up my ladder, did ye? If I'd knowed it, I could ha' sent ye down a rope what'd ha' helped ye up faster'n ye could ha' come yesself. What brung ye up yer?"

"I had no other choice. My boat was swamped, and I had to choose between being drowned or coming up here."

"What fetched ye on ther river in a boat? Minin'?"

"I was escaping from the Men in Green. My companions were captured, but the outlaws believed me dead, and did not stop to look for me. Luckily I found your ladder and came up, and here I am."

Ned then briefly related the adventures of the last two days, the man listening with great attention and evident interest until the close.

"Wall!" he said, bringing his fist down upon his other hand, "them durned cusses ought fur ter be hustled out'n this yer country durned soon. I mayn't be overstraight myself, but I'll be durned ef I'm one o' that sort, luggin' off young women, interferin' with other folks' business, an' shootin' any one what didn't think as I did."

"And do you live up here on the rocks?"

"Yas; and that yer ladder is fur my convenience, fur it saves me a good ten mile; this yer place being so high, ye hev to go a mighty long way around to git anywheres. I've got a boat hid down thar in the rocks, whar ye couldn't find it, and I 'casionally goes down river, but I ain't used that yer ladder fur some time now, and I guess it are rayther weak in spots."

At this moment a terrible growl was heard in the rear of the hut, and Ned looked around in surprise.

"What is that?" he asked.

"On'y one o' my grizzlies gettin' hungry, I reckon. He won't hurt ye, 'cause I are got 'em all shut up tight."

"Grizzly bears up here?"

"Yas; I are got a whole ranch of 'em, and I makes lots of money out of 'em; but don't ye say nothin'."

CHAPTER XV.

THE Nuggetville coach, driven by Jeff Ferguson, was proceeding along the mountain road at a fair rate of speed one cloudy evening, a day or so after the disappearance of Ned Henderson, on its way to the town.

The doings of the Men in Green had of late rather exceeded in lawlessness anything that had preceded them, and no one knew when the coach might be stopped by these marauders, its contents plundered and its occupants robbed, and perhaps murdered.

There was still a considerable distance to be traveled before reaching Nuggetville, and the chances were that it would be quite dark before this was accomplished, a circumstance that was not at all calculated to put Jeff into the most pleasant state of mind imaginable.

"Get up, there, ye beast!" he cried, taking one of the leaders a crack on the ear with his long whip, and making him start up at a lively rate. "We ain't got all night to fool, so stir yer lazy pegs."

They had just ascended a gentle slope, and now began to descend on the other side.

It grew darker and darker, there being many signs of an approaching storm, the clouds gathering thickly overhead, and the distant rumbling of the thunder being anything but pleasant to hear.

Jeff whipped up his horses, tugged away at the reins, braced his feet against the iron guard-rail, and held his team well in hand, for an upset was not to be thought of just then, and this part of the road was not the safest, by any means.

Suddenly the shrill blast of a bugle was heard ringing out upon the air, and echoing again and again through the pass.

Upon the instant a score of mounted men dashed out from behind the rocks on either side, and from in front, and drew up in a solid line right across the path.

"Cuss the luck!" muttered Jeff. "I was sartin suthin' like this yer was goin' to happen."

"Halt!"

There was no choice but to obey the command so sternly given.

In fact, two of the new-comers had already seized the heads of the leaders and forced them back almost upon their haunches.

"Who says so?" demanded Jeff, pulling out a revolver.

"The Men in Green!"

"Cuss the Men in Green! I'll make some on ye Men in Red, durned if I don't."

Jeff fired two shots hastily, bringing down one of the outlaws and badly wounding a second.

Then he quickly threw himself from his seat, knowing that after this it would be dangerous to remain there.

A shower of bullets flew over the spot where he had been only a moment before, but fortunately for him, none of them took effect.

Then, while some of the outlaws cut the traces and sent the horses galloping down the road, others, as though by preconcert, made a rush for the coach doors on both sides and threw them open.

A dozen gleaming revolvers stared the frightened passengers in the face, and all seemed to have been suddenly struck by paralysis.

"Fork over your dust, quick!" cried one, who seemed to be the leader. "and make no fuss about it, or we'll shoot."

The straps confining the baggage had been suddenly cut, and trunks, boxes and traveling-bags came to the ground with many a bounce and crash.

Half a dozen of the robbers thrust their hands quickly into the inside of the coach and helped themselves to watches, jewelry and fat pocketbooks in a twinkling.

Others had leaped upon the coach top and seized upon the few passengers who had not dismounted, hastily relieving them of their valuables, and then tumbling them to the ground without ceremony.

Meanwhile the baggage had been broken up, and many valuable packages had been rifled, such articles as were of no particular use to the outlaws being scattered over the rocks in the most reckless manner.

Jeff was mad, and as he dashed away in the gloom, emptied his revolvers at the bandits, more than one shot telling fatally.

Several volleys flew after him, but a turn in the path saved him, and the bullets were flattened against the rocks.

"Let him go," said Hood, who was the most active man of the whole party. "He can do us no harm now, and some day we will avenge the deaths of our comrades upon him."

Some of the inside passengers had now begun to make a show of resistance.

They were quickly dragged out of the coach disarmed, and placed against the rocks, guarded by two well-armed robbers.

The saddles of the Men in Green were loaded with goods stolen from the coach. Gold watches ticked away in the pockets of many of them, the gold chains ornamenting the fronts of their green buckskin hunting-shirts, while some wore big gold rings and heavy seals taken from the luckless passengers.

The greater number of the band carried dark lanterns, the gloom being now most intense, and by the light which these afforded carried on their nefarious work.

Everything was done with the utmost expedition, every movement seeming to have been planned beforehand and given to some particular man or set of men.

The whole thing, therefore, was done with the regularity of clock-work, and in the quickest possible manner.

In fifteen minutes after the first blast of Robin Hood's bugle had been heard, the whole affair had been consummated.

Then, leaving the plundered coach overturned in the road, with the passengers securely bound to the wheels or shafts, the robbers rode away in the direction from which they had first appeared.

One shrill blast of the bugle rang out, and then the only sound to be heard was the tramp of the steel-shod hoofs of the robbers' steeds as they rode away into the storm and the night.

The tempest had now broken with full force, and the rain descending in torrents, the thunder rolling in deafening peals, and the lightning flashing in blinding sheets.

The luckless passengers, drenched to the skin, shivering and shaking with the cold, stood bound to the coach, unable to free themselves, none of them being placed near enough to each other to be of any assistance to their companions in misery.

At last, after a half hour of most anxious waiting, a footstep was heard coming along the flinty road.

Then a voice cried out:

"Hallo, therel! Haven't you got away yet?"

"We can't," said one; "we are bound."

The new-comer approached, and proved to be the driver, and there was not a man there who was sorry that he had not escaped.

Nobody blamed him, for they had all seen how courageously he had behaved, and not one of them imputed any treachery to him, even had they not known that he was ac-

counted one of the squarest men in all California.

Jeff quickly released them from their unpleasant predicament; and then all hands, wet and shivering, and utterly miserable, made their way towards Nuggetville, which they reached about midnight, the whole town being in a state of alarm as to what had become of the coach.

"Who did it?" asked Sam White, when Jeff had given the dry details of the affair.

"The Men in Green; and though I hate like Sam Hill to say it, they were led on by our poor young lady's brother—Tom Ainsley."

CHAPTER XVI.

WE left Ned with the strange creature he had met at the top of the cliff at the moment that the latter had announced to the young man that he kept a ranch of grizzly bears.

"A ranch of grizzlies!" said Ned, in astonishment. "What do you mean? Do you keep grizzly bears chained up in this hut?"

"Wall, no, not edzackly in the hut, but in a pen down back yer a bit. I've got some jest about ready fur the market."

"For the market! Do you sell to menageries?"

"What's them?"

"Animal shows, circuses, exhibitions."

"Oh, you mean to the shows?" Wall, yes, I do sell a few that way, but the feller what buys 'em says there too risky. Ye kean't tame a grizzly no more'n ye kin tame a wolf, and there's too much risk in having 'em toted round the country. Sides that they eat a pile, and any kind o' ordinary bear painted and fixed up 'll pass for a grizzly among the folks in the cities what never seed one."

"Then where is your market for grizzlies?"

"Don't ye know that there's a bounty o' twenty-five dollars fur every grizzly b'ar-skin what ye fetch the gov'ment?"

"Yes."

"Wall, it ain't allers so easy to kill the old critters when they're runnin' free, but it is when you've reared 'em from cubs, and has 'em penned up, and kin kill 'em from behind a high stockade fence."

"Ah! you raise your grizzlies for the market, then—kill them when they're big enough, and sell their skins for twenty-five dollars apiece!"

"That's about the heft of it. Not a bad idee, is it? I used ter do that some years ago in Minnesoty, when they was a reward on wolves' scalps, and I hed one o' the biggest wolf ranches in the State; but it got to be so common that the price dropped, and I cl'ared out and came West."

"But suppose your grizzlies should get away? Wouldn't they be likely to play the deuce and all in the settlements? They ain't putty fellers to have hangin' around."

"No, they ain't, fur a fack, but I don't calc'late to leave 'em get away, and as soon as they gets dangerous, I kills 'em and puts away their skins till I has enough to take to market."

"H'm! it's a queer kind o' trade."

"Them fellers ye hears roarin' out thar wants ter be killed this evenin', and I'll git ye to help me do it. Ye wouldn't mind it, I s'pose?"

"No, although I never shot at a b'ar behind a fence. I allus faced 'em and took all the risks they was."

"Wall, I've three or four big, snarlin' fellers in thar, and if ye like, ye kin step inside and hev a bout with 'em, if ye like that sort of fun; but as for me, I'd a heap sight rather stay outside and plug 'em."

"Well, if it comes to that, I don't know but what I would, too. I never invited a grizzly to fight; he generally axed me first, and when there was no gettin' out'er it. I don't know as I ever walked up to one and asked him if he didn't want to be shot, and I ain't sure that I'd want to try it."

"Wall, thar! I never asked ye if ye war hungry, and I s'pect ye must be, arter climbin' up that yer ladder o' mine. It's a longish bit up to the top, ain't it?"

Thereupon this singular character threw an old blanket that draped one end of the room, and disclosed a smaller one behind, where there was a rude table, upon which were laid some rough earthen dishes, such as are used by the Indians.

Two stools had been placed by the table, and Bart now signed to Ned to take one while he uncovered the dishes, thereby allowing a savory odor to escape.

Ned needed no second invitation, for his appetite was keen after his hard work, and while he did not eat as much as his host, perhaps, he consumed twice as much as he ordinarily did and with a keener relish.

"That's right," observed Bart, "I like to see ye eat. The man what I eats with is my friend, an' won't never go back on me, nor will I on him. If I hadn't thought ye war the right sort, I wouldn't hev sot down to the same board wid ye. That's my religion, wot there is of it. Them I don't like, I don't want nothin' to do with."

Ned made no reply to him, and presently Bart continued:

"Mebbe I ain't reglar square out and out, as some folks regard it, but I never go to stealin' women or takin' other fellers' hosses, or runnin' off with gold dust. The gov'ment wants grizzly skins, and if I give 'em to 'em, whose business is it where I gets 'em? Anyhow, you'll keep mum 'bout what ye see up here?"

"To be sure. I know you're down on the outlaws, and that's enough."

"You bet I am. I know this yer Hood, as he calls hisself, but that warn't allus the name he had."

"What is it?" asked Ned, eagerly, wondering whether his suspicions were correct after all.

"Wall, I don't want to say what it wur, but it'll come out some day or nuther. Wall, if ye've ate all ye want, I kin mix ye a punch what'll make yer hair curl, and gi' yer some terbacker if ye don't mind a corn-cob pipe. It's the sweetest thing ye kin smoke, to my notion, but then ye know everybody hasn't got the same taste, as the Chinees said when he married the nigger wench."

Ned, however, cared neither to smoke nor drink, but Bart did enough of both for two men, meanwhile keeping up a running discourse upon things in general in his characteristic style, which greatly amused Ned.

After an hour or so it began to grow dark, and then Bart led the way to the rear of his cabin, where there was a strong, high stockade built, inclosing a space some fifteen feet square.

On one side of this, near a heavy gate, was a ladder leading to a little platform on top, and to this they both ascended.

In the space below him Ned saw a number of grizzly bears, ranging in size from cubs to full grown, fierce-looking animals, these latter being particularly savage.

"How'd ye like to go down thar?" asked Bart.

"Thank ye, I'd rather not; it's safer up here."

"Wall, jist watch un take that there big feller what's growlin' at ye," and Bart raised a heavy double-barreled gun to his shoulder and fired.

He took the fierce brute right in the eye, killing it instantly.

Ned praised the shot, but at that instant Bart raised a warning cry and started to descend.

Two huge grizzlies, angered at the sound, had suddenly rushed at full speed towards the stockade.

One of these threw his body with terrible force right against it.

The timbers shook and creaked as though they would be forced apart.

The result was that Ned was thrown from the little platform.

He fell upon his back inside the fence, directly in front of one of the bears.

A cry of horror arose to his lips.

He was entirely unarmed, and right before him was a large grizzly, ready to eat him up.

He sprang to his feet and retreated as far as the stockade, the two bears now closing in upon him with savage growls.

He stood against the stockade, bravely facing the huge brutes, but his case seemed well-nigh hopeless.

They advanced upon him, one on each side, with a rush and a roar, and he gave himself up for lost.

Whichever way he turned, it would but be to run into danger.

Suddenly he felt the muzzle of a rifle thrust under his arm.

There was a loop-hole in the stockade, and through this the weapon had been pushed.

"Stand still!" cried a voice on the other side, "and I'll see what I kin do."

It was the bear-keeper that had spoken.

Then, as the bears leaped forward, the sharp report of a rifle was heard.

It was none too soon.

One huge bear fell dead at his feet and the other paused for an instant, as if undecided what to do.

His indecision saved Ned's life, and cost him his own.

CHAPTER XVII.

WHEN the bears rushed for the stockade, Bart, knowing their strength and ferocity, had quickly made his way to the ladder.

Looking back, he saw that Ned had not followed.

He was about to call to him, when he heard the sound of the shock caused by the animals throwing themselves against the fence.

Then he saw Ned suddenly fall inside the stockade.

A moment later he heard his cry of terror as he realized his frightful position.

"Good Gosh!" he muttered; "the boy'll be killed—chawed up by them b'ars!"

He had discharged one barrel of his gun, but to reload it again was but the work of a minute.

There was a loop-hole close at hand, and through this he thrust the barrel of his weapon.

Calling to the young man to remain quiet, he fired.

The result has already been made known.

The second bear had paused for an instant, and this gave the man time to aim.

He glanced along the barrel, took careful aim at the creature's heart and pulled the trigger.

When the smoke had cleared away he saw, by the rapidly waning light, that the bear had fallen.

Then quickly opening the gate a short distance he hurriedly called to Ned to come out.

The latter was not slow in accepting the invitation.

He hurried out of the gate, which Bart then closed and barred.

Ned grasped the rough fellow's huge hand, and shaking it hastily, said:

"You have saved my life. How can I thank you?"

"Wall, if ye can't, don't, that's all," returned the other. "I like ye, and I couldn't stand havin' ye chawed up by them b'ars, and so I cleaned 'em out. We'll have more b'ars' meat fur the winter now, and thur's seventy-five dollars' wuth o' skins inside that yer stockade."

The two went back to the cabin, it being now quite dark, and as the evenings were cool Bart lit a fire in the hut and he and Ned sat talking for an hour or more.

At length Ned became drowsy and fell asleep before he knew it, and Bart, lifting him in his strong arms, laid him on a pile of bear skins and left him sleeping.

When Ned went out the next morning he found bear-skins tacked to the stockade, Bart having already begun to give them the rough tanning.

Two more bears were killed that day, and Bart said he calculated to go down soon to dispose of what skins he had on hand.

Ned chafed at the delay, but he was still weak and feverish from the excitement through which he had gone, and Bart declared that it was not safe for him to leave for some days yet.

Ned declared that he must, that Cora was still in the hands of the Men in Green, and that he knew not what dreadful things might happen to her if she remained a prisoner.

"You said you knew this man Hood," said Ned, suddenly. "Who is he?"

"Oh, he's a natural born cuss what I once knowed."

"Is he Tom Ainsley or not?"

"Ainsley? Well, he moight have took that name, but I never knowed it if he did."

"Did you ever know Ainsley?"

"Can't say I did."

"Then you never heard about his being accused of having killed Jim Wyckoff, down at Nuggetville?"

"Can't say as ever I did."

"Under what name did you know this man Hood?"

"Under several. Guess he has as many as a cat has lives."

"And he was a criminal?"

"A what?"

"He had committed crimes; done something for which the law held him responsible?"

"Oh, yes, ye kin bet he did—and not once nuther, but a dozen times. He killed a pard-

ner of mine in Minnesoty, and I run across a man what said he'd put a through a brother of his'n down in Missosy 'sides stealin' horses, robbin' banks, and like jobs."

"And what was he called then?"

"Then? Well, he was called Wild Tom then; but afore that—"

"Well, before that he was called?"

"Suthin' else."

"Wild Tom!" thought Ned. "Ains name is Tom. Can it be that he—no, no, cannot believe it."

"S'pose ye tell me all ye know about t yer Men in Green," said Bart, after a pause.

"It moight be that ye kin give me an idea. Ned then related all he knew of the laws, from his first meeting with Scarle Sam White's place, his capture, his adventure in the boat, his rescue, his subsequent capture, his escape, the finding of the note, and, in fact, everything up to the of seeing Bart.

"Did ye ever suspect who fired that shot what cut the rope when ye was in boat?"

"I could not account for it!"

"Ye don't think that Hood or any of his men done it?"

"No; it seemed to come from the other side of the river."

"And when ye found yerself on the below the falls, it were Hood what lift up."

"So I thought, and I fainted."

"Did ye never suppose that ye might been wrong?"

"No; it was his face, and no other."

"And ye never knowed who cut the that time?"

"It is a mystery to me. Some one, dently, who wished to save my life."

"Then wasn't it him what lifted ye up o' the water?"

"No; it was Hood himself."

"Ye're sure of it?"

"Yes."

"Then I can't help ye none, 'cause thought maybe I moight ha' knowed who were that tried to save ye, but I don't. Le go in and have grub."

Bart would say no more about Hood, matter in what way Ned tried to question him, and at last the young man gave up effort.

The bearkeeper promised that in two days more he would go down to the river, and with this Ned was forced to be content.

Two days after this, Bart, having made a bundle of skins, fastened the stockade securely, shut the young bears into pens, closed up his cabin, and started for the settlement.

He told Ned that he was going to sell skins to Sam White, the latter acting as his agent in the matter, and this made Ned wonder if he did not know more about Nuggetville and its affairs than he had been willing to confess.

Before descending the ladder, Bart produced a strong rope, made of bear sinews closely twisted together, and as strong as steel, one end of which he made fast around a rock above, lowering the other over the cliff, after having first fastened his bundle of skins to it.

As Ned descended, he had this rope to assist him, Bart going first, and using another of the same kind.

While Ned had taken nearly two hours to ascend, the descent was made in less than a quarter of that time, as during the greater part of the way Ned merely slid down the rope, his hands being protected by rough gloves, which Bart had lent him, and which acted as clamps upon the rope when he went too fast.

Having reached the bottom, Bart fished his boat out from under a shelving ledge of the cliff, where no one would have supposed it to be, and after baling it out, the skins were thrown in, Ned took his seat, Bart produced the oars, and away they went down the river.

They shot the falls in safety, and after reaching Nuggetville, to find that little town in a state of great excitement over the bery of the stage-coach, which had taken place the night before.

Ned's appearance after so long an absence was hailed with delight, but to the young fellow's dismay, the news that he had returned for his own was anything but reassuring.

Ted and Cora were still missing, the Men in Green had committed new depredations, and, worse than all, Tom Ainsley had

recognized as the leader of the outlaws, and more than one were ready to swear that Cora was fully as much implicated as he was himself.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHERE were Ted and Cora all this time?

As for the young lady, we must leave her for the present and follow the fortunes of young Ted Ferguson.

At the time of the disaster to the boat both he and the young lady were seized by the Men in Green, the latter placed in Hood's boat and Ted in one of the others, commanded by the man who had called himself Jed Andrews.

The boat pulled up stream immediately, no attention being paid to Ned, as it was supposed that he had been killed, and Ted, therefore, left in doubt as to his fate.

The boy was placed in the boat without being tied, and the whole fleet proceeded back toward the hidden retreat in the old deserted mill.

When they came in sight of the old mill Ted suddenly leaped to his feet, took one of the oarsmen a crack alongside the head with his fist, and butted the other in the stomach with his bullet head.

The fellow tumbled over backward, and Ted leaped into the water, dove and swam under the surface for some little distance.

Then he came up for an instant, saw where the boats were, dove again, and allowed himself to float down stream.

When he arose he had rounded a bend in the river, and was out of sight of the boats.

He landed and struck right into the heart of the wood, never pausing till he was a good half-mile from the river.

Here he sat down and wrung out his wet clothes, leaving them in the sun to dry partially before resuming them.

In an hour or so he began to feel hungry, and wondered how he should find anything to eat, having no weapon nor the means of making a fire.

He turned towards the river-bank, and had gone about half the distance when he suddenly ran right into a man standing beside the bushes.

The man was dressed in a complete suit of green, and the boy had therefore not seen him until he ran upon him.

"Oh, gosh! if there ain't another!" he muttered, turning to run.

The man quickly threw out his hand, and catching Ted by the collar, pulled him back.

"Lemme go!" sputtered the boy, kicking and scratching, and trying to get away.

"Hold on, my lad; I'm your friend."

Ted turned and caught sight of the speaker's face.

"H'm! I guess ye are!" he answered, scornfully; "ye're Robin Hood, that's who ye are. D'ye s'pose I don't know ye?"

"I am not Robin Hood."

"Wall, ye're in green anyhow, and that's enough. Ye ain't no friend o' mine, so jes' leave me!"

Look again, and perhaps you can tell better who I am."

Ted took a good look, and when the man released him, did not attempt to run away.

"Well?"

"Wall, ye've got the same face as Tom Ainsley what used to live in Nuggetville, and what killed Jim Wyckoff and runned away to git out o' being hung, and ye've got the face o' the leader of that gang in green, and ye look jes' like one o' 'em, too."

"You're right and wrong too, my boy. I am Tom Ainsley, and I am not Hood. I did kill Jim Wyckoff, but I did go away to be hanged. I am dressed in green, but not one of the band you speak of."

"D'ye think I'm green, too? Wall, I don't, but I'll hear what ye've got to say. I'm tired, and don't want to run, and I hope ye could fetch me back durned quick that yer gun o' your'n."

"Ye are hungry, too?"

"Oh bet."

"Then suppose we have something to eat?"

"Now ye're shoutin'."

The man produced from a bag at his side a lot of rabbits, all dressed and ready for eating, and then, making a fire of wood, gave out little or no smoke, laid them on hot coals.

Ted sat down on a moss-covered rock near the fire, the man sitting opposite, and then Ted said quietly:

"Now, Teddy Ferguson, you're the friend

of Ned Henderson, and he's always been mine, so I want you to listen to me. I have adopted this suit of green, because I greatly resemble, in form and feature, the leader of these outlaws, Hood, as he is called."

"Then ye're Tom Ainsley, arter all? Honest Injin?"

"Yes, but being taken for a Man in Green, I can come and go among them, and learn all their plans, taking care not to be about when my double is present. I dare not return to the settlement until I can prove my innocence, and so must remain in the woods."

"Do you know who is the real feller?"

"No, but I am determined to find out. I know this man Hood and suspect him, and therefore, when I learned of these Men in Green, I succeeded in getting among them, obtaining a suit, and learning many of their secrets."

"I discovered that my sister Cora was in these parts, heard of her being carried away, but have not been able to rescue her yet, but shall do so before long. Where is Ned?"

"Don't ye know?"

"No; but I suspect that you and he were unsuccessful in rescuing my sister."

Ted then told him the whole story.

"Then she is again a captive. To-night we will go to the old mill and rescue her."

"D'ye know about it?"

"Yes, and I know that, hidden away in the secret caves under it, are many boxes of gold and other valuables stolen from the miners."

"Gosh! S'pose we could get 'em?"

"Some day we will."

"But why in time don't ye go to the settlement and tell what ye know?"

"And be hanged for a crime I never committed? Who would believe me? Men have seen Robin Hood, and they will swear that I am he. Even Ned believes it."

"Ye don't say!"

"I saved his life by cutting the rope when he was in danger of being hanged, and afterwards, when I picked him out of the water, he thought I was the outlaw and fainted. I was obliged to leave him, and the real outlaw found him; but again I helped him, and shot one of the scoundrels; but for all that he believes me to be Hood himself."

"Was you in the mill last night?"

"Not in sight, though I was there and saw Ned's escape from death. I was too late to save him myself, but Providence did that."

"Wall, I reckon it's all squar', but I'd like ter see t'other feller, and be sure that you ain't him."

"I will show him to you to-night. Now pitch in and enjoy yourself."

Ted did as he was told, and made a hearty meal, his appetite being rather sharper than usual, his companion being obliged to cook more provisions before his hunger was appeased.

"What yer going to do next?" asked Ted, washing down his meal with a pint of fresh, cold spring water.

"Go to the old mill, but we can't do that until to-night."

"Then maybe we'd better get nearer to it, 'cause when it's dark it'll be hard traveling through this yer wood."

"I know the way well enough, and it's safer here."

"Oh, bother! it's safe enough anywheres, I reckon, so long as that chap Hood don't see yer."

"Very well, we will push on if you had rather."

The two set out, therefore, and, an hour or so before sunset, reached the spot where Ned and the boy had encamped upon a previous occasion, not far from the old mill.

When it began to grow dark, Ainsley left Ted to go to a reconnoitering expedition, promising to return shortly.

Ted waited about ten minutes, when suddenly Ainsley appeared with three of the Men in Green at his side.

"Hello! here's our man!" one of them cried, and Ted was pounced upon and made a prisoner.

"I say, let go!" he cried, kicking and squirming. "Are ye goin' back on a fellow like that, Tom?"

"I've got you fast, my young cocksparrow, and don't mean to let you go," said the other.

"Fetch him to the cave, boys, and we'll see if he again gets away from Robin Hood or the Men in Green. Not alive, I'll bet."

"Confound it all!" muttered the boy to himself, as he sat in a small, dark room under the mill where his captors had thrown

him; "Tom Ainsley and Robin Hood is one feller all the time, and I've been a durned fool to trust him!"

CHAPTER XIX.

It was publication day in the office of the Weekly Nugget and Miners' Gazette, the little newspaper published in our mining town, and things were pretty lively.

The Nugget was a four-page affair—size of pages, 8x12—was set up by the editor, his son, and one man, printed on a hand-press by the man, distributed by the son—cash in advance—and had a slashing circulation, particularly when there was anything lively going on in town.

Jack Quoins had been a printer in the East, fairly well-to-do, but, having imbibed the gold fever in common with so many others, had started for California with his son Dick, a young fellow of eighteen, to make his fortune.

He was wise enough to take a few fonts of type, a hand-press and other necessary materials with him, and reaching Nuggetville and finding the field as yet unoccupied, concluded that he could do better by sticking to his former trade than in taking up the pick and shovel.

He hired one small room of Sam White, and got out the first issue of the Nugget, doing the composition, printing and selling all himself, the novelty of the thing causing it to be a decided success.

After three or four issues he was able to take a bigger office, and, running across a tramp printer named Hunter, who had drifted out to California and was earning but a scanty living in the mines, engaged him as assistant, a change which Hunter was only too glad to make.

The Nugget had now been running something over a year, and was established upon a good paying basis, Quoins doing a strictly cash business, getting his pay in advance for advertisements and subscriptions, doing all his own work, or nearly so, and having to pay Hunter but little besides his board and lodging.

The present issue contained the account of the robbery of the stage coach, the story of Ned Henderson's adventures with the Men in Green, with diagrams of the old mill, the river, and Bart's bear ranch—an old block of a Mexican war map turned upside down and relettered, this was—besides several columns of local notes.

The demand for this number, it will readily be seen, was enormous, and Hunter could not turn them off the press fast enough, Dick Quoins coming in every ten or fifteen minutes to empty his pockets of coin and gold dust, and get a fresh supply of papers.

"Nothing like it, dad!" he tried the last time he came in; "the little Nugget is going off like one o'clock. Bet you a dollar you can sell a thousand copies; lots of men are buying two—one to read and t'other to send away."

"It's the diagrams that do it, Dick."

"Yes, them and the reading matter. If you could print Robin Hood's portrait now you'd double the circulation."

"I've got an old woodcut of Gen. Jackson; do you suppose I could cut in a slored hat, put on a beard and make it go?"

"Guess not, dad; you haven't time would hardly do to let Old Hickory as he is. Let her slide this time, but all the papers you can."

Off ran Dick with his armful which he sold for two bits apiece as eating, so he said, having no need any distance, but finding all the customers could supply right at hand.

The two men were still working off the press ten minutes later, Quoins having meantime sold a couple of dozen to customers in the front office, when Dick, running in, crying, excitedly:

"I say, pop, stop the press and set out an extra! Great excitement in town! Capture of the leader of the Men in Green!"

"What!"

"I'm giving it to you straight, dad. You run out and get an interview with him, and Hunter and I will set up the first of it out of my head."

"The outlaw chief in town, did you say, Dick?" cried the editor, scarcely able yet to credit his senses.

"Yes, or what amounts to the same thing, Tom Ainsley."

"Great Jupiter! just in time. The edition

will go off like the shares of a first-class mining company."

"Put on your hat quick, dad, and go to the jail—Sam White's cellar, you know."

"Hunter, take out some of those local notes or advertisements so as to make room for the new stuff. Dick, you set up an introduction, and I'll be in with some copy shortly."

Then grabbing up a bundle of papers, the enterprising editor threw on his hat and coat and bolted out into the street, the tumult around Sam White's tavern having increased nearly to a riot.

Arrived at the place, he found that Tom Ainsley was just being escorted, under a strong guard, into the tavern, Ned Henderson and Ted holding back the crowd.

"He's given himself up!" was the cry, "and he has a right to a square trial!"

"Wasn't he captured?" asked Quoins, as he sold his papers right and left for as much as he could get.

"No; he gave himself up; he swears he's innocent, and is willin' to stand a trial."

Having disposed of all his papers at a handsome profit, Quoins announced in a loud tone that he would shortly issue an extra, containing a full account of the affair, together with an interview with the prisoner, copies of which could be had at the office for one dollar each, on account of the enormous expense attending the publication.

He quickly followed the guard into the house, all others being excluded, and, a few minutes later, sat with his note-book in his hand, in front of the prisoner, who had been heavily manacled and handcuffed.

Half an hour later he came forth and ran with breathless haste into his office.

His sheets had been carefully numbered, the interview being written out as fast as it had been held, and these sheets were now divided into three parts, Hunter, Dick and himself each taking a part.

There was a case for each man; and, locking the door, they set to work at lightning speed, the clicking of the types being the only sound to be heard.

Half an hour later Dick was standing behind the rude counter in the front office, selling off the copies of the extra as fast as his father could supply him.

All the interesting matter of the first issue had been kept, and in addition to this there now appeared, under a quarter column of big head-lines, the following, which may be summarized thus:

"Tom Ainsley, accused of the murder of Jim Wyckoff, and who, for six months past, has been a fugitive from justice, voluntarily gave himself up this afternoon, and is now lodged in the town jail.

"He expresses a willingness to stand a fair trial, and asserts his entire innocence of the crime of which he is charged, and in an interview with the editor of this lively journal, denies that he has committed any wrong, and makes many interesting disclosures.

"His strong resemblance to the outlaw chief, Hood, has led to many misunderstandings, he says, the villain purposely showing himself in public in order to throw suspicion on Ainsley.

"His sister Cora could exonerate him, he says, but, unfortunately, she is still a prisoner, where, no one knows; the Men in Green having abandoned their quarters in the old mill."

There was considerable more of this, the interview taking up three columns of the first page, but that was the substance of it.

This was one of the Nugget's great days. Hunter got an extra ten dollars. Dick was promised a pony to aid him in his newspaper delivery, and Quoins' heart and pocket were both full to overflowing.

While the excitement lasted, the shrewd fellow took advantage of it and reaped a golden harvest, for he knew that on the next day he could not sell his extras for the price of old paper, and therefore took care to have none left over, beyond what was needed for his files.

"That'll do until next week," he mused, after his work was done that night, "and now I can take a rest."

And all this time the man that had caused this excitement lay quietly on his rude bed in the temporary jail, perfectly cool and collected, as though his life were not in danger from the angry mob, who knew but one law—that expounded by Judge Lynch.

CHAPTER XX.

POOR Ted was thrown into his dismal dungeon, firmly believing that Tom Ainsley and Robin Hood were one and the same person.

That he wronged the former has been already surmised by the reader, but Ted did not know this, and devoutly believed that he had been made the victim of a miserable trick.

"Cuss him! I wish I'd stuck a knife into him!" he growled, as he sat in the cold and darkness, nursing his wrath.

"Ned's dead and Miss Cora's took. I'm here where I can't get out, and that feller what I trusted is only the boss greeney after all. Why the deuce didn't I shoot him when I had the chance?"

"Here I am, nobody knows where, and nobody likely to know, and what's goin' to happen to us all? If I could get out, I might do suthin', but how in time am I goin' to?"

However, Ted managed to get a good night's rest, and in the morning he was given a good breakfast, and then left to amuse himself as best he might until night, when he was given a hearty supper, and having nothing else to do, went to sleep and never woke up until morning.

His friend, Tom Ainsley, had discovered his capture too late to prevent it, but resolved to rescue him as soon as possible.

There was no chance to do it that night, however, as the old mill was guarded, and Hood remained with his men.

The next day Ainsley hung around, and in the course of the afternoon managed to get inside, but had no opportunity to see the boy.

He succeeded, however, in taking out several bags of gold dust, and these he hid in a hollow tree near the spot where Ned and Ted had encamped.

At night Hood was in the mill again and Tom dared not enter, although he was most anxious to know what had become of Cora.

Two days passed, but at last, one night, the Men in Green went away, leaving only a few to guard the mill, their object being to rob the Nuggetville coach.

This was Ainsley's opportunity, and he improved it forthwith.

Those that chanced to see him thought that it was Hood returned for something or other, and thought nothing of it.

He found the place where Ted was confined and let him out.

"Don't say a word," he whispered. "It is I—Tom—not the outlaw. I saw them take you away, but could not aid you."

Ted at first refused to leave; but Tom assured him that he meant no treachery, but that he was a friend.

One of the Men in Green overheard this, and rushed into the cell, vowing vengeance.

Ainsley promptly knocked him senseless, and Ted bound him hand and foot.

The man soon recovered, and was about to shout for help, when Ainsley clapped a pistol to his head and hissed:

"One sound and you are a dead man! Tell me where the lady is concealed."

"I don't know. Are you not our leader?"

"No, I am not. I am Tom Ainsley, as you well know. Where is the lady?"

"Concealed somewhere in the mill. Captain Robin Hood swears that he will make her his wife."

"I will kill him first! Tell me, do you know this man's real name?"

"I know him only as Robin Hood."

"And where is this place where he has hidden the lady?"

"I don't know."

Ainsley pressed the muzzle of his pistol to the man's head.

"No lies!" he hissed. "Tell me, or I fire."

"On my life, I don't know!" cried the man, in terrified accents. "Hood alone knows the secret cells."

"Do you swear that you are ignorant?"

"Yes—yes; I know no more than you."

"Is it under or in the mill itself?"

"I know not. Upon my honor I don't."

"You seem to be of a better sort than most of these outlaws, and I believe you. How came you to join them?"

"Hood had me in his power. I forged a note in the East; he knew it, and compelled me to go with him and join his band."

"You have heard him tell of Ainsley?"

"Yes, often; and he swore to ruin him."

"He did? And yet I don't know the villain, though I suspect much. Well—well, the time will come when all will be made right. Come, Ted, we must leave here."

"This feller'll yell like blazes the minute we are out."

"I must gag you, my friend," said Tom. "And maybe it will be better, anyhow, as you may be suspected of having assisted us to escape."

The fellow was then gagged, Tom locking the door behind him, and making his way to the outside.

It was not necessary to pass around the falls to get out, as they could make their way into the mill by a secret door, and thence reach the outside.

Ted had provided himself with the weapons of the prisoner, and he and Ainsley now left the mill cautiously by the lower entrance.

As they were about to pass along the bank, Ainsley caught his comrade by the hand.

There were voices in the upper part of the mill, and both paused to listen.

"Cora!" whispered Ainsley.

"Perhaps we can get her away," returned Ted.

Both instinctively then bent their steps toward the upper part of the old mill.

Reaching the door leading to the interior, Ainsley looked in cautiously.

Cora was standing gazing out upon the water, no one else being evidently near.

Ainsley advanced with great agitation.

"Cora, do I find you again after so long an absence?"

"Tom!"

She knew his voice and recognized him despite his costume—despite his resemblance to the outlaw.

She knew him and flew toward him with joy, the sight of his loved face causing her the greatest delight.

As the two met with a loving embrace, a third party suddenly appeared.

This was one of the Men in Green who had been detailed to watch the fair prisoner while she enjoyed the night air.

"Pears to me suthin's wrong!" he cried, rushing forward.

"Ah! the guard! I had forgotten him!" cried Cora. "Fly, my brother, fly, before the outlaws surprise you!"

"I do not care for a single man!" cried Tom, rushing upon his opponent.

The fellow had drawn his bugle from his belt, and a shrill blast now awakened the echoes.

Tom leaped upon him, and with one blow sent him flying out of the window into the water.

Just outside there was a boat moored.

"This way!" cried Ainsley, making for the opening.

Ted and Cora followed, but at that moment half a dozen of the outlaws came rushing to the spot.

The edge of the dam was bare in some places, and a daring man could easily cross it to the other side.

Ainsley started to do so, when one of the outlaws followed.

Right on the brink the two men clinched, each trying to throw the other off.

Crack!

Crack!

Ted had found his path blocked by the Men in Green, and on the instant he had fired.

Although his shots told, the odds were against him, and he was separated from the young lady and obliged to fly.

Meanwhile, the struggle on the dam was going on, both men exerting themselves to the utmost.

The water splashed and dashed about them, the moonlight throwing their forms into bold relief.

The outlaws dared not fire, not knowing which was friend or foe.

Ted had secured the boat, and was now paddling rapidly across the river, just above the dam.

A shower of bullets flew about him, several passing through his hat.

Suddenly one of the struggling men seizes the other by the throat, bends him far over the precipice, and frees himself from the other's grasp.

Then, with a quick movement of the foot, he knocks the man's legs from under him, and in an instant hurls him over the brink.

Which one has fallen?

"Ted!" shouts a voice. "The boat—quick! But don't come too near!"

It is Ainsley who calls.

Then it is the other who has gone over the falls.

Ted shoves the boat up as close as he dares

Ainsley springs in, and the two paddle out into the stream, away from the dangerous spot, and, exerting themselves in the face of the current, reach the opposite bank in safety.

CHAPTER XXI.

"Down the bank with you, quick!" cries Ainsley, leaping ashore and pulling Ted after him, the boat being left to drift whither it will.

"What's the hurry? They can't catch us." "There is another boat at the foot of the bank on this side, and we must get it before they stop us."

The two make all speed down the incline, and presently reaching the level, Ainsley pulls a boat out from under the bushes.

He and Ted spring in, and seizing an oar apiece, pull down stream.

The outlaws are aroused, and now they can be seen running along both banks, waving torches and shouting to one another.

Above all the din sounds the blast of a bugle. Then many shots are fired, which Tom Ainsley returns with fatal effect.

"They won't follow us in the boats," he mutters, "and we can soon distance them."

Suddenly, however, Ted utters a cry of alarm.

"I say, this yer boat has got a big hole in the bottom, and the water is coming in like Sam Hill!"

"Can't you bail?"

"No; there ain't nothing to bail with, and it's coming in too fast."

"Then run her on shore, quick."

The boat was out of repair, as Ainsley knew, but in his haste he had forgotten it, and now it was too late to remedy the evil.

A hasty glance assured him that the boat could be kept swimming but a few minutes.

These minutes, then, must be used to the best advantage.

"Let me have both oars, Ted."

On seizing the two, he turned the boat's head toward the bank, and bent all his energy upon the task of rowing.

"Jump as soon as we strike, Ted."

He is steering toward a small, sandy beach, in the receding waters have left, facing instead of turning his back on it, as is usual in rowing.

There is backing water, so as to make the boat's head, it being necessary, under the circumstances, that he should see the lands.

The water is rushing in at the bottom, but he pulls vigorously, every stroke telling to the greatest advantage.

The boat suddenly grates on the sand and shoots half way up the bank.

Ted leaps out, and in an instant Ainsley follows, leaving the boat stranded and half full of water.

Then, seizing Ted's hand, the man plunges into the thicket, and presently reaches a small cave, not much more than a hole in the rock, where he and Ted conceal themselves.

The outlaws pass within three feet of them, but their retreat is undiscovered.

However, it is just as well to remain hid for a time; and they therefore do not move from their refuge.

An hour passes, and then all is still in the forest.

The air has that peculiar feeling which usually portends a storm, and Ainsley does not wish to be caught without a shelter.

He leaves the little cave, therefore, and he and Ted hurry towards the town by a short cut, which he knows.

They can hear the thunder sounding at intervals, and know that the storm is not far off.

Hurrying through the woods, they reach a more open, though wild and desolate spot, bounded by rocks and peaks, and here they find a deserted hut.

To this they hurriedly made their way, and seek a shelter just as the storm breaks. Wind howls and shrieks and threatens from the roof from off their heads; the rain falls fiercely upon it, and, making its way through the leaky roof, forms great pools on the floor.

There is one dry spot near the window, and the two companions take refuge.

The lightning, from time to time, reveals the wild scene without and lights up the interior of the wretched hovel with its lurid glare.

Ainsley and Ted stand there for some time, when the man suddenly seizes Ted's arm and drags him away.

A clap of thunder has suddenly sounded, but besides this Ainsley has heard another sound.

The steady tramp of horsemen.

"They are coming," he whispers.

He pulls Ted away from the window, and presently a brighter flash than ever illumines the place.

He glances quickly out, utters a low cry of surprise and says:

"Come here, Ted. Look out when the next flash comes, but take care not to be seen."

Ted peers out and sees, indistinctly, the forms of horsemen passing the window.

Suddenly a vivid flash comes, and Ted starts back in surprise.

"I told you I would show you Robin Hood, the outlaw."

"Wall, no wonder I thought you was him," whispered the boy.

The outlaws were returning from plundering the Nuggetville coach, and at their head rode Hood.

His face was plainly seen by the boy, as the electric flash lit it up, and the latter saw how easy it was to mistake him for Ainsley, and vice versa.

Ainsley quickly drew Ted into the great chimney place, out of sight of any one that might enter, and said:

"You see, then, that there are two of us?"

"Yes, but I swan! if I hadn't seen ye both together, I couldn't scarcely hev believed it. He ain't yer brother, is he?"

"No; he is my evil genius."

Some time elapsed before the two dared venture from their hiding-place, and then Ainsley first reconnoitered and found that the outlaws had gone on.

They evidently thought that the hut was too small to contain them all, and so had given up the idea of taking it as a shelter.

The rain continued to pour down in torrents and as the inside of the hut was much better than the outside, they concluded to remain here the balance of the night.

Tom tore away some dry boards around the door, and started a roaring blaze in the big fire-place, there being no danger now that any one would see it.

Then he and Ted stretched themselves on the floor, out of the wet, and both went asleep, never awaking till the sun was well up in the heavens.

The rain had ceased, and everything was bright and joyous, so, after having partaken of breakfast, with which the woods provided them, the two set out for the town.

"You ain't going all the way, are ye?" asked Ted.

"Hardly, my boy. There are too many in Nuggetville who are down upon me, and until I can clear myself of the charges against me, I prefer to keep away from it. However, I will go with you far enough for you to find your way and then leave you."

They traveled on, over rock and hill, through wood and brake, across streams, and along ravines, and at last paused in a little glade to rest and partake of food.

As they sat there, totally unconscious of danger, chatting away merrily, Ainsley suddenly heard the snapping of a twig, and then the sharp click of a revolver.

He sprang for his weapon, which lay beside him, and was about to spring to his feet, when a voice called out:

"Make one move and ye're a gone customer! Surrender, you murderin' cuss!"

"Hallo! It's Ned!" cried Ted, springing up.

"Don't fire, Ned, it's all right—we're both on our friends!"

In another moment Ned Henderson, Bart Snowdin, and half a dozen others, entered the glade.

"Aren't you Robin Hood?" asked Ned.

"No; I am Tom Ainsley."

"Shoot him!" cried several.

"Stop!" commanded Ned. "If the man is guilty, he at least deserves a fair trial, and that is what he has never had."

"And I am willing to stand it," said Ainsley, boldly. "I will go back with you to the town. I am innocent, as I can prove, and only want a fair show."

"Blowed if ye shan't have it!" cried Ned and Bart in a breath.

"So ye shall!" echoed all the rest.

That afternoon, then, Ainsley returned to the town, and voluntarily gave himself up, and that was how the Nugget happened to do such a good stroke of business and put so many dollars into its editor's pocket.

CHAPTER XXII.

NUGGETVILLE was in a state of excitement. Tom Ainsley had given himself up, and was now in confinement.

He had intimated his readiness to stand a fair trial, and this was now about to take place.

There being no place large enough to accommodate the crowds in attendance, it was decided to hold court in the audience room of the Opera House.

This was a two-story frame building, the large hall being capable of holding three or four hundred people on a pinch.

On the stage, the curtain being drawn up, were two long tables and a big arm-chair placed upon a raised platform for the judge, the jury being seated in chairs on the right, and the prisoners' box and witness stand being on the left, the unoccupied space on the stage given up to Quoins, who acted as special reporter for the occasion, the witnesses and a number of invited guests.

The judge was a broken-down lawyer from the East, who had somehow got stranded in the town, and the counsel were Sam White for the prosecution, and Ned Henderson for the defense.

Gentleman Dick acted as sheriff, to keep order in the court, and Jeff Ferguson, being then in town, served as court-crier, called the witnesses and kept the jury in order, as many of them were more disposed to argue the value of their respective mining claims or engage in horse trades than to pay attention to the case before them.

The place was densely packed, all the windows being left open in order to allow a free circulation of air, the day being a warm one, and only an occasional breeze coming in through the windows.

The entire depth of the stage was used, the manager having set an interior scene, supposed to represent a hall of justice, painted by the local artist, of coarse cotton, and tacked against the rear wall, the wings being pushed aside to give more room.

The judge rapped upon the table in front of him with a heavy ruler, and Jeff shouted, in sonorous tones:

"Order in the court!"

The most complete silence at once settled over the place, and Gentleman Dick, faultlessly attired in a full suit of black, a white "boiled" shirt, especially laundried for the occasion by Hop Wing, and in the spotless bosom of which glittered an immense diamond, shiny boots on his feet, and with his hair and mustache oiled and perfumed to a degree, arose gracefully, and facing the court, said in his suavest tones:

"If it please your Honor, this is a re-trial of the case of The People against Thomas Ainsley, accused of the murder of James Wyckoff, nearly a year ago, or, to be more explicit, on the night of September 18, 1849. Are you ready to hear it?"

His Honor intimated that he was, and then Sam White arose, and stating that he represented the people, called the first witness, the father of Ned Henderson.

Witness deposed that he had been going home on the night in question, when he had come upon Bob Trainor, standing at the door of a little hut, used by miners to store their tools; that Trainor had called him in; that he had seen the dead body of Jim Wyckoff lying on the floor with a bullet wound in the head, and that Trainor had told him that he had seen Ainsley shoot the deceased, but that Ainsley had escaped.

Then he went on to say that he, his son Ned, and several of the miners had gone to Ainsley's cabin, where they found him at supper, apparently unconscious of the charge against him; that he had denied it and had held converse with Ned, with whom he had been a favorite.

There had been talk of lynching him, the witness continued, but he and Ned had counseled moderation, and the prisoner had been confined to await his trial, but later on his pistol, one barrel of which had been discharged and the bullet found in Wyckoff's body fitting it, the crowd became clamorous for his life, attacked the temporary jail, and, in the confusion or before, it could not be told which, the prisoner had escaped.

Being cross-examined by Ned, the witness admitted that he had not seen the murder committed, but had taken Trainor's word for it. He had examined the body and had seen the bullet taken out, had seen that it fitted Ainsley's pistol; did not know where the pis-

to be found or when, but believed that he had heard it was discovered in the path a few yards from the hut.

Henderson then sat down and Bob Trainor was next called, his appearance causing a little excitement, as he was known to have been the principal witness against Ainsley on the latter trial.

When he had been sworn, he turned to the court and said quietly:

"Your Honor, may I tell the story of this melancholy affair, just as I remember it without being questioned, but allowed to go on in my own way?"

"Yes, always remembering that you are under oath."

"I shall not forget that, and, had I not been called here, should have been reluctant to say anything at all. You can understand my position, gentlemen; I am a suitor for the hand of Miss Ainsley, the prisoner's sister; she has promised to marry the man that proves her brother's innocence. What, then, must be the feelings of the one who must swear this man's life away?"

He was nearly breaking down at this point, Ainsley himself turning his face away to hide his emotion; but by an effort he controlled himself and continued:

"Gentlemen, all, I am on my oath, and shall tell a straight story. I haven't anything against Tom Ainsley, and I only said what I did at the time of the murder because I believed him guilty. If he isn't, I hope it may be proved. If he is, I am not to be held responsible for telling the truth, though God knows I would like to see him cleared, whether or not, for his sister's sake."

A murmur arose, which the judge quickly quieted by rapping on his table, and then Bob Trainor went on, more coolly:

"Gentlemen, all, let me remove any false impression that my recent words may have created. I know that I am under oath, and shall tell the truth and give the story of the murder, as far as I know it, just as I saw it, and as nearly as I can remember it."

"It was on the night of the 15th of September, last year, at about dusk, that I was going along the path by the river, when Tom Ainsley, as I believed, came from behind and passed hurriedly, answering to my hail with a surly growl."

"I will say that this was not like Tom, and that I was surprised. His face, as I saw it in the dim light, wore an angry look, and he didn't seem to care to see nobody, and, though I called to him pleasantly enough and tried to follow him, he muttered an oath, hurried on, and was soon out of sight behind a turn in the path."

"I thought that maybe he had a run of bad luck, and I was ready to advise him, but he turned away quickly, pulled his hat down over his eyes, and was off like a shot."

"My road led the same way, and I followed, but he never looked back, and, as I say, I presently lost sight of him, and never saw him again until I reached the old tool-house."

"I kept on at an easy gait, and as I reached the place I saw Ainsley, as I supposed, and the little light there was, gentlemen, shone square upon his face—I saw Ainsley, I say, engaged in an angry growl with Wyckoff."

"They didn't see me, and all of a sudden Ainsley pulled out a pistol and fired right at Jim Wyckoff's head, one shot and no more."

"The man staggered, clapped his hand to his head, reeled as far as the door, and then fell inside, while his murderer looked around with a triumphant grin on his face."

"Gentlemen, I wasn't ten feet away from the spot, and I do not see how I can have been mistaken. I wish to God I was!"

He paused, the cold sweat standing out upon his forehead, his face pale and haggard, his limbs trembling.

Not a sound broke the awful stillness which rested on every one there, and in a few moments the witness went on with his story.

"When I saw the man fall, I uttered a cry of horror and ran forward, for the first time showing myself. Ainsley saw me, uttered an oath, and then turned and fled like a deer, making no effort to injure me."

"I went into the house and found Jim Wyckoff lying dead on the floor, the bullet having entered his brain. I ran out, and presently old Henderson came up, and I told him what had happened."

"Presently we two, with Ned Henderson and others, went to Ainsley's house, where we found him cooking his supper and not at

all ruffled or disturbed—as cool, gentlemen, as though he had not just committed an awful crime. To look at him then one would have said that he was innocent. I am willing to say that, for he did look so."

"I charged him with the crime and there was talk of lynching him, but Ned said no; and he and Ainsley talked together, and finally he consented to be locked up to await a square trial."

"That is all I have to say about the matter, gentlemen. I have omitted nothing that I know of, but I'm ready now to answer any questions that the counsel would like to put."

Sam White scratched his head, looked from Bob to the judge, and then to Ainsley, and finally said:

"I don't want to ask nothing; but maybe you might, Ned."

"No," answered Ned, calmly. "I have nothing to ask him."

CHAPTER XXIII.

NED'S answer caused no little astonishment.

Everybody had expected that he would subject Bob to a rigorous cross-examination, and endeavor to break down the latter's testimony.

When he announced, therefore, that he had nothing to say, there arose a decided hush in the court, which required the united services of the judge, Gentleman Dick, and Jeff Ferguson to quiet.

The next witness was Dick Quoins, who testified to the finding of Ainsley's pistol, in company with his father, the latter corroborating his testimony, the weapon having been delivered at once to Sam White, acting sheriff of the town.

The pistol itself had been identified as Ainsley's by reason of a small plate on the stock, on which the prisoner's name was engraved, more than one person having previously seen and handled it.

Testimony was then given by the local physician who had probed for and discovered the bullet in Wyckoff's head. Jeff Ferguson then testified to having seen Sam White examine the pistol and fit the bullet, which he saw the doctor take from the body, into one of the chambers.

This finished the evidence as far as the murder was concerned, but several more witnesses were examined in order to elicit the story of the discovery of the prisoner's escape, the subsequent meeting him under the guise of Robin Hood, and his final capture.

The prosecution then closed its case for the time, Ned having done very little cross-questioning.

Ned then called several witnesses to testify concerning Ainsley's character and disposition previous to the murder, and by sharp questions, throwing out all hearsay evidence, and making the witnesses confine themselves to facts strictly within their own ken, showed conclusively that Ainsley had not been of a quarrelsome disposition, and had never been known to have a disagreement with any one.

Bob Trainor willingly gave his evidence on this point, and said, as he had said before, that he had been greatly surprised at Ainsley's speaking to him in the way he had, as well as at seeing him engaged in a fight with Wyckoff, the two men having previously been upon amicable, if not closely intimate terms.

Ned then called upon Ainsley to testify in his own behalf, and the audience began to show a most lively interest in the proceedings.

Ainsley arose, pale but perfectly collected, was escorted to the witness stand, was sworn, and then proceeded as follows:

"Gentlemen, I have heard the evidence against me, and must say that there appears to be no malice in it; but that the witnesses, and particularly Bob Trainor, have only stated what they believed to be the truth."

"Bob Trainor has been deceived, though he is honest enough in his belief. I did not meet him that night, and I didn't go near the old hut, nor did I see Jim Wyckoff, nor ever had any fuss with him."

"I worked all day at the washings in the river, and went home early. Any one that knows where my house was would know that I wouldn't have to go by the old hut to get to it."

"When I got home I washed up, lit a fire and cooked my supper, and was just ready to eat it, when Bob, Ned and some others came

in, told me I had killed Jim Wyckoff, and made a great fuss."

"I was astonished, as anybody might be, and maybe was nervous and flushed and a bit that, and looked like I was guilty. Innocent men often do under such circumstances."

"Ned had always been my friend, and I was the closest of the lot, so I took him to one side and we talked it over, and I agreed to stand a trial, feeling sure I would get clear."

"I had missed my revolver, but I didn't think much about it, as I'd never had occasion to use it, except for shooting coyotes, and when I was in the lock-up I thought of it."

"I heard about the finding of it, and that the bullet in Jim Wyckoff's head fitted it, and heard of Bob's evidence, and saw that I had no chance."

"Men would talk, in the saloon and in the street, and I couldn't but hear them, and a nigger that brought me my food also told me something, and that's how I kept posted. Nobody helped me to escape; I did that all by myself."

"Look at it, gentlemen. I had been rather wild and had come West to try and do better. I had never killed anybody, and the thought that such a crime was to be fastened on me was awful. I had drank and gambled and wasted my chances, but the stain of blood was not on my hands."

"Here I was, then, the evidence against me, men clamoring for my life, nearly every one against me, the whole crowd pitching in to one man. What show had I for justice?"

"Do you wonder that life was sweet to me? I had turned my back on my old ways, was just beginning to see the good of living different, was in a fair way to prosper, was generally liked in the camp, and had one or two fast friends—the most that any one makes, gentlemen, in this world, when you come right down to facts."

"Now, with all these bright prospects before me, here comes this black, damning cloud of suspicion right across me, and I see death staring me in the face—a shameful death—and I as innocent of murder as a child."

"I didn't blame Bob Trainor then, I don't now. I knew there was some horrible mistake; I knew I was a free man. What was I to do? Stay and face the angry mob clamoring for my life? Not one of you would have dared to reason at that time, and you can't know it."

"No; life was too precious to me, and I made up my mind to escape, to discover the real murderer, and then return and clear myself. It was an easy matter to break out, and I did, and got far away long before the lynchers arrived."

"I haven't much more to say, and then I leave my case in the hands of the jury. There is a man in these mountains who I never living image; it was he that Bob Trainor saw; it is he that others here have seen, and swore that they saw me. Capture the leader of the Men in Green, and you will learn more about this murder than I can tell you."

"You were identified at the robbery of the stage coach the other night," said Sam White.

"I was not near the spot, and Teddy Ferguson can tell you so."

"You've been seen wearing the regular outfit of the robbers, and was found with it on."

"I adopted it in order to discover the secrets of these villains, and discover, if possible, the real murderer, for in my heart I believe that Hood did it, and then threw the blame on me, purposely allowing himself to be seen that the evidence might be cleared."

"Do you know Hood?"

"I do not."

"Is he an old enemy of your'n?"

"Not that I know of."

"What makes ye think he wanted to throw suspicion on yer, then?"

"I cannot tell the reason; there is a mystery here which I cannot unravel."

"Then you can't throw no light on the motive o' the murder?"

"No; but at the same time who can say that I had one?"

"We'll leave that to the jury to say, that's all. Got any more witnesses, Ned?"

"Yes; call Ted Ferguson."

"Here you, Ted," shouted Jeff. "Wake up and tend to business, and, if I catch you in any lies, I'll warm the seat of your trousers so you'll think ye've been settin' on a hot stove."

"I ain't been asleep," said Ted, coming forward, "and I ain't going to tell lies, nuther, 't ain't 'cause I'm afraid o' a lickin'. If I save the young lady's brother I'm goin' to do it, for I don't believe he killed Jim Wyckoff any more'n I did."

Ted took the stand; Ainsley returning to the prisoner's box, and then the judge asked: "Does this boy understand the nature of an

"You bet I do, old cock," retorted Ted. "I ain't use any, though, or dad'll lick me. I know what oaths is. Cuss it, and and gosh, them's oaths."

"O—no, Ted, we don't mean that," said the judge, smiling. "Don't you know that you must tell the truth in court?"

"You bet, and anywhere else if I don't get whacked."

"And you'll tell the truth here for me?"

"You jist bet I will."

Ted was then accepted as a witness, and went on with his testimony, telling all he knew about Ainsley.

"He couldn't be Hood," the boy concluded, "I was with him when Hood went by, robbin' the coach, and was with him when we met Ned, and he gave hisself up. One of 'em can't be two, I guess, and I seed 'em both at one time. First off I thought he was a robber, and that he had gone back on me, after that I knowed that he wasn't."

Snowdin, the bear-keeper, was then called and testified to the resemblance between Ainsley and Hood.

"I know 'em apart if I seed 'em together,"

said Snowdin, "for t'other feller is older'n this one."

"What was Hood's name when you first

seed him?" asked Ned.

"Hud Wild Tom, and then it wur Hud-

son afterward Jones, and I knowed a

bit that said it wur suthin' else, but I

thought it's Hood, fast enough, when you come

to it."

"Did you ever know the prisoner before?"

"I never did."

"Or see him?"

"O."

"Gentlemen of the jury," said Ned, "we

have here a case of mistaken identity, and I

ask for an acquittal. The good character of

the prisoner, his absence from the scene of

the murder, his efforts to lead a better life,

the work he has done in endeavoring to hunt

outlaws—all these facts speak in his

favor. Even the witnesses for the prosecu-

tor speak well of him, and I demand his ac-

quittal."

White then arose and said:

"We want justice. If the evidence

shows the prisoner he must suffer. There's

no crime goin' on out yer, an' it's got

to be stopped. I hain't got no grudge again

st, but if he killed Jim Wyckoff, he

has to be punished. There ain't no evi-

dence except his own that he wasn't at the

place that night, an' more'n one saw him on

the stand. As fur losin' his pistol, how was it

he didn't recollect it afore? Folks don't

lose their pistols in this yer coun-

try. Besides, it wur found in ther road, not

on the place where the murder wur

committed."

"I seed the Man in Green before this

and if there had been two men looking

like—Ainsley and this other feller—

—I don't we have noticed it?"

"I ain't chargin' this yer jury, and so I

say no more. I only want justice, and

it be the same if the pris'ner wur my own

brother, and that's all I are got to say."

The judge then turned to the jury and said:

"Gentlemen, your duty is plain. You

must ascertain facts, and throw aside sym-

paties, likes and dislikes, good intentions,

and that sort of thing. The main ques-

tion is whether the prisoner did or did not

commit the deed, and if the evidence

shows that he did, you must give your ver-

dict accordingly."

"There is a reasonable doubt in your

mind whether he did it or not, he must have

benefit of it; and if it is clear, by the evi-

dence that some one else, resembling the

prisoner, committed the murder, then you

must acquit him. You may now retire, if

you wish, and consider your verdict."

After a hurried and whispered consultation took

place among the jurors, and then the fore-

man, rising and facing the court, said:

"In honor, we have already considered

the evidence, and are ready to give our verdict."

A hush fell upon the assembly, and

not the slightest sound broke the oppressive

silence. "Gentlemen, have you well considered your

verdict?"

"We have, and so say we all."

"Prisoner at the bar, arise, and face the

jury."

Ainsley arose, his face the color of death,

and looked firmly at his twelve judges.

Ned turned away his face and buried his

head in his hands.

Bob Trainor was as pale as Ainsley him-

self, and sat trembling like a leaf.

"Then, gentlemen of the jury, what is your

verdict?"

"GUILTY!"

Ainsley uttered a cry like the wail of a lost

spirit, and fell senseless in the dock.

Trainor gave a sob that could be heard all

over the room, rested his elbows on his knees

and buried his face in his hands.

Ned half started up and then sat down

again, looking the very picture of despair,

while a confused murmur arose in court, and

many pitying glances were turned to the pris-

oner.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A SHARP rap of the ruler upon the table in front of the judge restored order in the crowded room.

"Gentlemen," said the judge, turning to

the jury, "this is your verdict?"

"It is!"

They all answered in a breath.

"And so say you all?"

"So say we all of us!"

"Then all that remains is to pass sentence

and close up this matter."

Ned had, in the course of this brief dia-

logue, raised Ainsley into a chair and re-

stored him to consciousness, and now, stand-

ing by his side and supporting him, raised

him to his feet.

"Prisoner," said the judge, "you have

heard the verdict. Have you anything to

say why sentence of death should not be

passed upon you?"

"I am innocent," said Ainsley, simply.

"The evidence was against me. I blame no

one for this. I only ask for time to prepare

myself for death. Don't hurry me off to the

grave unprepared."

"I also would ask that a reasonable time

be given," said Ned. "Something may arise

which we do not foresee; the real culprit may

be taken. Give us a week's time, your

Honor."

"I don't object to that," said Sam; "that's

no more'n fair."

"Prisoner at the bar, you have had a just

and impartial trial, the weight of sympathy

has evidently been on your side, and the en-

tire proceedings have been without malice.

The evidence, you admit now, has been

against you, and the jury have considered

this. Gentlemen, you have not spoken of the

charge of robbery against the prisoner."

"It is clear," said the foreman, "that he

and Hood are different persons. The murder,

however, was done by him."

"Then, prisoner, you are sentenced to be

hanged by the neck until you are dead, the

day of execution being set for this day one

week, at ten o'clock in the forenoon; and may

God have mercy on your soul!"

"In a week, I will save him," said Ned.

"In my soul I believe him guiltless of this

crime!"

"So do I!" cried Trainor, springing to his

feet. "Circumstantial evidence has killed

men before this, but if it is possible to save

this man I'll do it. Ned, your hand!"

The two men, allies and rivals at the same

time, clasped hands and exchanged a warm

pressure.

The crowd, excited by this extraordinary

scene, raised a tremendous shout, and hats

flew up to the ceiling by the dozen.

"Silence!" thundered the judge. "Officers,

clear the court!"

Ned raised his hand and there was instant

silence.

"My friends," he said, quietly, "oblige me

by leaving this place in good order, and do not

jeopardize the prisoner's case by any unseem-

ly demonstration."

All the doors were then thrown open and

the crowd passed out quickly but quietly.

Ainsley was handcuffed and led away by

Jeff Ferguson and half a dozen men, there

being an evident fear that a rescue would be

attempted.

The jury was formally discharged and left their seats, mingling with the crowd, the judge chatted amicably with Editor Quoins, Dick and Ted had a friendly tussle over in one corner, Gentleman Dick growled at Hop Wing for not starching his shirt bosom stiffer, and the whole aspect of the scene was changed.

The room was at last deserted, the crowd having gone away, the prisoner returned to his place of confinement, and no one left but the manager of the theater and a few members of his company.

Quoins had gone off to make up his paper, it being publishing day on the morrow; Ned had gone to see Ainsley, Bob to his work, Bart to the tavern to fill up on whisky, and the others had separated in many directions.

"Well," said the manager, "I've seen dramas, some on 'em red-hot ones, but I never see anything to beat this scene here to-day."

"Couldn't we get up a new play for Saturday night," remarked the heavy man, "and do this business over again? 'The Miner's Oath; or, Saved from the Gallow!' How's that? I'll play the Man in Green, and will have a big combat in the last scene. Tracy can play the part of the hero, made up to look like Ned Henderson, and Hooker can do the

innocent man condemned to death."

"It's a first-class snap," put in the low come-

dian, "but where is there a funny part for me? I'm somebody in this company, you

must understand."

"I'll write you in the part of the China-

man," returned the manager. "You know

you do that immense."

"Let's sketch it out right here," said the

leading man, sitting down at the table recent-

ly occupied by the opposing counsel and pro-

ducing paper and pencils. "First, there's

the murder. We've got to have a woman in

it, and Dick Quoins will do that for us. He

don't mind earning a handful of dust, and

he's good."

"That's it—jealousy; that's the motive—

two men in love with the same woman; vil-

lain kills his rival; hero identified; put on

trial for his life; two other lovers; both swear

to prove accused innocent; woman carried off,

gallows ready; woman comes back, lover

proves other fellow innocent, grand combat

all around, red fire, curtain! How's that for

a rough sketch?"

"First class! Put in a comedy woman for

Dunbar, give me the Judge, write in a song

or two and plenty of fights, and the thing

will go like wildfire."

"Let the woman unravel the whole busi-

ness, and marry Ned; the brother is saved,

the Man in Green is the big villain of the

whole concern, all the mystery is cleared up,

and away she goes to crowded houses for the

rest of the week!"

Such were some of the many suggestions

offered in the framing of the minute drama

then under consideration.

What resemblance did it bear to the real

drama then being enacted in this far-away

town in the heart of the wilderness?

The sequel will show.

The day was now far spent, the sun being

already low in the heavens, the sky threaten-

ing rain, and everything betokening a storm.

In spite of this, Ned Henderson started off

upon his search, in the face of the coming

storm, and as the sun was sinking behind

the hills, stood on an eminence overlooking

the little town.

Sam White's tavern was plainly visible,

and pointing toward it, Ned raised his hand

and said:

"There lies an innocent man condemned to

death. Before another week has passed I

will clear his name from guilt, or take my

place beside him on the scaffold!"

CHAPTER XXV.

GENTLEMAN DICK LUDLOW'S gambling establishment was in full blast, the place being crowded, and the proprietor himself dealing at the faro-table.

The room was papered in a tawdry fashion, being lighted by gilt chandeliers furnished with oil lamps, the floor neatly sanded, a bar resplendent with glass and many colored bottles, being in full swing at one end of the room, with negro bartenders to serve the thirsty, while a very brassy band, borrowed from the theater, discoursed alleged sweet music at the other end.

It was late at night, or rather, early in the morning, and at a time when most people

are in their beds; but this was a gala night, and the early closing rules were not in force in this isolated town of the far West.

The play had been pretty heavy, the bank having had a run of hard luck, which would have discouraged any one but the placid Dick Ludlow, who was content to bide his time, knowing that fortune would smile most radiantly upon him, all in good time.

"Dick's a square man," said one of a party of three or four playing poker at a side table, "and if a feller loses here, he knows it's all fair and aboveboard."

"Yer bet he's square," returned a second, "and he don't have none but square men playing here. If a feller is caught cheating here, he gets hustled out pretty durned soon, now, I can tell yer."

"You bet he does."

"D'ye see that yer big feller takin' a drink at the bar—that feller with the store clothes and diamonds?"

"Yes; what about him?"

"Wall, he's one o' the squarest men agoin'. D'ye know what he did down at 'Frisco?"

"No; what was it?"

"Wall, he had a big game down thar, and one night he caught a feller cheatin', runnin' in marked cards and fleecing a young tender-foot out'n all his dust."

"Wall?"

"Wall, this yer man, Jack Braddon, Faro Jack, the dandy, he just spots the feller at his game, an' quicker'n greased chain lightnin' he whips out his gun and plugs the sucker clean through the palpitator—kills him dead at the fust shot."

"Wall, that wur right enough."

"Yas; but that ain't all that Dandy Jack done."

"No?"

"No. When the thing was explained nobody blamed him, for they all knowed he kep' a straight place, but what does he do but turns about and give the feller a fust-class funeral—stick him in a reg'lar rosewood box with silver trimmin's."

"Ye don't say!"

"Yas, and made the widder a present o' fifty dollars, stocked her house with provisions for the winter, and sent around a couple o' loads o' wood. Now, that's what I call square."

"Wall, I should remark. It ain't many fellers as would do as much."

"I wonder if them fellers over thar," said the third man, indicating the musicians, "I wonder if they think they're playing music! It's the worst ever I heard. They ought to be shot!"

Thereupon he whipped out a big seven-shooter, with the evident intention of carrying out his well-meaning but rather sanguinary designs, when one of his companions hastily interposed.

"No, no, don't do that!" the man said, quickly; "they're doin' as well as they know."

"Oh, well, then, it's all right," and the shooter was returned to the man's boot.

Not far away two men—a beardless youth and a rough-looking, low-browed, ruffianly sort of a fellow—were having a quiet game of euchre for high stakes, the table being littered with coin and bags of gold dust.

The young fellow was excited with liquor and played wildly, but even then would have been a match for his opponent had the other played an honest game.

So palpable was the fellow's cheating that one of the colored waiters, in passing, noticed it, and without saying anything, went over to where Gentleman Dick was dealing and called his attention.

"Wait a minute, Pomp," said the gambler, politely. "Make your bets, gentlemen, make your bets. A tenner on the ace? Thank you. Did you copper the jack? Very good. All ready? Red wins. Thank you, gentlemen. The bank seems to be getting back some of its losses. But this world is nothing but ups and downs, you know. Now, then, Pomp, what is it?"

"Dere's a stranger ober dere, Marse Dick, what ain't playin' squar'. He done been cheatin' a young fellah," whispered Pomp, in the other's ear.

"Where? Show me him, and I'll soon stop it. Go over and tell him to quit."

Pomp went off, and Dick, rising from his chair, said, quietly:

"Wait a moment, gentlemen; there's a little matter to be attended to first."

At a sign from the gambler, the music sud-

denly stopped, and the men looked around to see what it meant.

A moment before, Pomp had glided behind the big ruffian's chair, and detected him secreting a bower.

When the music stopped he put his hand on the man's shoulder and said:

"You, sah, we don't 'low none ob dat in dis yer place. Dis is a 'spectable house, an' eberyting must be done on de squah!"

"Don't allow what, ye ace of spades?" growled the man, turning red.

"Don't allow hidin' cards!" and Pomp made a grab for the one which the fellow had dropped in his lap.

"What's the matter? That's one of the cards of my hand; I just dropped it."

"Dat won't wash. You hab got yo' right keards in yo' hand, and it ain't yo' deal. Tol' you what, stranger, ye kain't cheat in dis yer house."

"Who's cheatin', ye ebony skunk?"

"You is."

"You lie!"

At the same time the fellow leaped to his feet and struck Pomp a blow in the face that floored him.

Pomp hung on to the card, however, and quickly jumping up, he exhibited it.

"Dar ye are, gents!" he cried. "If dat am not cheatin' I dunno what is."

The young fellow, realizing that he was being played upon, made a sudden rush at the villain, and tearing open the collar of his shirt, caused several high cards to fall out upon the table.

All this had happened in an instant, but the crowd by this time were terribly excited.

Gentleman Dick sprang to the spot with the agility of a cat, and seized the man by the throat.

"This is no place for you!" he cried. "I'm a square man, and I won't have any other kind in here."

Quick as a flash the man drew a pistol and fired.

The boy that he had been cheating was too quick for him, however, and had dashed his arm up, causing the bullet to fly over Dick's head.

Crack!

At the same moment Dick's own pistol sounded, and the ruffian fell heavily to the floor, dragging the table after him and scattering the coin all around.

"My God! I'm killed!" he groaned. "Send for a doctor."

A space was cleared around the dying man who lay gasping for breath, and he presently raised himself upon one elbow, looked around him and muttered hoarsely:

"It serves me right. Listen all, for I've got something to say."

A breathless silence instantly fell upon the place.

"I am one of the Men in Green," whispered the man, "and there is a plan on foot to sack this town, and murder all the enemies of our band."

He paused for breath, and then continued, evidently much weaker:

"Tom Ainsley is not the—"

A rush of blood from his mouth choked his utterance, and he fell back exhausted.

"Not what!" cried Dick Ludlow, bending over the man; "not the murderer of Wyck-off?"

The man nodded and tried to speak.

"Who, then, committed the crime?"

The man essayed to pronounce some name, but a second hemorrhage prevented him, and falling back heavily he expired in an instant.

"He is dead!" said Dick, "and the story he might have told is dead with him. He might have saved Ainsley, but now I'm afraid it's too late!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE Men in Green were holding high carnival in one of the secret caverns under the old mill.

This was a natural cave which had been discovered by Hood and his men while excavating under the mill, and its appearance was most weird and fantastic.

The most perfect arches, composed of columns of glittering spar, arose at regular intervals around the cave, joining in the center, and forming a dome, from which depended a long, glittering stalactite, whose irregular, uneven surface reflected the light from a

hundred facets, making it appear like a resplendent chandelier.

Grotesque figures, formed by the hand of nature alone, stood in niches around this singular apartment, and here and there were arched entrances, dark and solemn, leading, seemingly, into the very bowels of the earth.

It was a most wonderful apartment, and more so from the fact that the hand of man had not fashioned it, but that all was due to nature alone.

Torches of pitch-pine and other resinous woods, thrust into crevices here and there around the cave, brought out all its weird beauty, and the man must have been callous, indeed, that would not have been awed by the majestic sight.

The fluted columns, the strange figures, the great chandelier, all shone with all the colors of the rainbow, one reflecting the other, until the effect produced was most dazzling.

Around a huge block of stone—left there by some convulsion of nature—sat a full score of the outlaws, drinking, carousing and singing songs, the night being already far spent, and yet no sign appearing of the revelry coming to an end.

A little apart from the others, in front of a small upright column of sparkling stone, formed by the drippings from above, sat the outlaw, a bottle and two drinking cups placed before him.

Near him, apparently much against her will, sat Cora, moody and thoughtful, a look of disgust and horror on her beautiful face, as if all this were utterly distasteful to her, as indeed it was.

"Cheer up, my beauty," said Hood, staggering to his feet and standing unsteadily before her. "I've got you in my power, and I'm going to keep you. I know that which would free your brother from prison and save him from the gallows, and I will say it on one condition."

Cora made no answer; and the man, swallowing a mouthful of liquor, went on huskily:

"If you'll be my wife, I'll take my merry men into yonder town, force your brother's prison, take him out and set him free, name the murderer, and tell those fools to catch him if they can."

"You don't know that some of my own men were on the jury that tried him, do you? You don't know that there are men in that town, respected and all that—never suspected of any wrong—that are heart and soul with me in everything? You don't know it, but I do."

"Be my wife; and with the power I possess I'll clear your brother and set him free; refuse, and he dies in less than a week."

Cora only gave the man a look of the most intense scorn; and after taking another huge swallow of the fiery stuff before him, he continued:

"I know that Tom Ainsley is innocent of murder. I know who did that night's work. It might have been myself; it might have been some one else. Who it was doesn't matter now."

"I can give the man's name, and I will, and take Tom Ainsley out of prison by force, provided you will be my wife. I have long loved you, and I swore years ago that you should one day be mine."

He was becoming garrulous, and Cora waited with the most eager anxiety, hoping to hear something that would give her a clew to the real murderer.

"I've told you what I can do," he continued, advancing to her side. "And now, what answer do-you make?"

"I cannot believe you. A man that would commit the crimes you have cannot be trusted."

"By Heaven! you shall be my wife whether you wish it or not. You shall kiss me, at all events."

The outlaw seized the poor girl in his grasp and attempted to press a kiss upon her lips. Cora broke away from him with a desperate struggle, and seized a torch which was stuck into the wall near-by.

Grasping this, she struck the outlaw across the face as he advanced upon her.

He staggered for a moment, and then rushed upon her with the fury of a tiger.

Hastily retreating, Cora fled down one of the dark passages, the torch lighting her way as she ran.

The outlaw pursued her, when suddenly finding her retreat cut off, the passage ending in a small circular apartment, she dashed

the torch upon the floor, hoping to elude her pursuer in the darkness.

The torch was not extinguished, but fell upon some substance that began to burn brightly.

It was an old bit of canvas thrown over a number of kegs standing in one corner.

At this moment, while Hood was endeavoring to seize the girl in his arms, staggering unsteadily, two or three of the outlaws entered the place.

A simultaneous cry of horror burst from the lips of all.

"My God! we are lost!"

"The powder kegs!"

"We shall be blown up!"

The burning canvas covered a number of kegs of gunpowder!

The place was the storehouse and magazine of the band!

At any moment they might all be blown into eternity!

"For God's sake, do not resist! Come away if you value your life!"

Thus cried one of the outlaws, seizing Cora in his strong grasp.

Another laid hold of the chief, and dragged him from the fatal spot.

They knew not how soon the explosion would take place and hurl them all to destruction.

Reaching the main cavern, they shouted lustily:

"Run for your lives! There is fire in the magazine!"

This announcement produced as startling an effect as though the explosion itself had taken place at that moment.

Cora knew that her life depended upon getting out at once, and she made no resistance.

She and her companion hurried away down one of the dark passages, and were soon in the council chamber.

The outlaws came hurrying after them, breathless with haste, though many still remained behind.

Hood, Cora, and half a dozen of the band reached the lower part of the mill, and crossed over to the bank as a rumbling was felt under them.

They quickly dashed into the woods, many following and hastening away in various directions.

Boom!

Boom!

Boom!

Then there came a series of explosions, each louder than that which preceded it, and the air was filled with sulphurous smoke.

There was a pause of several minutes, and then, with a frightful crash and roar, a column of fire was seen to shoot right up through the old mill, while a shower of burning missiles fell all around.

The mill itself, torn to atoms, tottered for a moment, and then fell with a crash into the flood, while a final explosion now took place, the mill dam was broken in many places, the wheel hurled from its place, the formation of the bank changed, the waters turned into new channels, and, dashing and tossing in angry glee, sent tumbling down stream in a mighty flood.

The old mill was a thing of the past; the secret haunt of the outlaws had been broken up, and many of the evil-doers had perished in the awful wreck.

Cora was safe, as were also Hood and the greater part of his band, but it seemed as though vengeance were at last overtaking the transgressors, and that this was but the first of a series of blows that would annihilate the band and make the name of the Men in Green a thing of the past.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THERE was another witness to the destruction of the old mill and the secret caves, of whose presence none of the outlaws were aware.

This was Ned Henderson.

He had come up the river in a skiff, and had just sighted the mill, when the sound of several explosions in rapid succession broke upon his ear.

He stopped, and in a few moments he saw a column of fire shoot up through the center of the mill.

The dam-wall was suddenly rent asunder, and the penned-up waters came rushing down in a mighty flood.

The banks shook as though an earthquake

had passed, and the river seemed to rise up from its bed and hurl itself through the breach.

The mill fell in ruins, the wheel went crashing into the race below, the swollen waters carrying away the whole of the dam, and portions of the bank came surging onward like a moving wall.

The young man's peril was imminent.

He hardly understood what had happened. One thing only he knew.

He must reach the bank at once, or he would be lost.

Standing in the boat he used one of his oars as a paddle, throwing all his strength upon it.

Once that angry flood seizes him in its grasp, and he is lost forever.

There is no help for him unless he speedily reaches the bank.

Never did men paddle more desperately; never was there more need for exertion.

The boat whistles through the water; it touches the bank; Ned leaps out and plunges into the wood as though Satan himself were after him.

The water rushes on, overflows the bank, washes out huge gullies, tears up trees by the roots, and leaves nothing but destruction in its wake.

Ned is safe, and now he begins to wonder what could have caused the explosion; whether the outlaws were at the bottom of it or not, and if any of them still remain alive.

For some time Ned remained in the wood, and then, as the day began to dawn, made his way to where the mill had once stood.

No trace of it remained, the banks and the dam being entirely changed in appearance, the water now pouring over in a solid mass from shore to shore, while here and there were swift eddies and deep pools, whose edges were lined by jagged rocks.

Not a sign of life remained, though here and there in the water, whirling around and around, were bits of blackened timbers, making their way slowly down towards the falls.

At the foot of the fall the waters roared and surged as they had never done before, and on the bank could be seen deep pits where the tide surged in and out, ever restless, ever unquiet.

The mill was gone, and with it the retreat of the outlaws, the caves having been utterly destroyed by the blowing up of the magazine, and the subsequent explosion of steam caused by the water flowing into the gaps thus made.

Whether any of the outlaws yet remained alive was a question to be decided.

Passing around the falls, Ned ascended the river higher than he had as yet gone, keeping along the bank, and maintaining a strict watch for his enemies.

An hour later, passing around a bend, he suddenly came upon an open space of considerable extent, where the bank was high and overhung the stream.

On the edge of this bank were two men, dressed in suits of green, talking earnestly together.

They saw him as quickly as he discovered them.

"There will be two less of the accursed band!" cried Ned, throwing his rifle to his shoulder.

Crack!

Crack!

One of the men threw up his hands, uttered a cry, and fell into the water, his body being carried away by the swift stream.

The other had fired at Ned, but the shot had just missed him, and now the young fellow fired again.

The outlaw was hit, but not fatally, and, as he hastened away, he put his bugle to his lips and blew a shrill blast.

It was presently answered, and, through the trees, Ned could see the forms of men dressed in green hurrying to the spot.

"Blow my buttons, I reckon this isn't a safe spot," muttered Ned, hastily retreating.

Several shots were fired after him, but fortunately none of them did any damage, Ned's flight being too hasty to allow an accurate aim to be taken.

Our hero saw no more of the Men in Green that day, the outlaws having gone off to look for a safe retreat among the mountains.

Owing to the loss of so many of their men, the plan of attacking Nuggetville and releasing Tom Ainsley was given up, Hood swearing that the man should swing, as payment

for the lives of his men lost the night before.

During the next two days Ned searched high and low for the outlaws, resolving not to return to town until he had found them.

He lived in the woods and mountains, shooting his food as he required it, sleeping in hollow trees, on the bare ground or in caves, enduring many dangers, but resolving to bear anything that he might rescue Cora, hunt down the outlaw and save Tom Ainsley's life.

At last, one day at nightfall, the day of Tom Ainsley's execution being fearfully near at hand, Ned, in looking for a place to sleep, came most suddenly and unexpectedly upon a little log cabin, many weary miles from the town, almost hidden under a ledge of rocks, and nearly concealed by the huge boulders which were thrown around.

A light streaming from one window of the little cabin was the means of discovering it to Ned, who otherwise would have passed it by unnoticed.

Thinking that it was the abode of some solitary miner, and that he could find shelter for the night, our hero advanced, and rapped on the door with the butt of his pistol.

"Come in!" cried a voice from the inside, and Ned pushed open the door.

There, sitting in front of a fire before a rude bench which served as a table, was the man of all men whom he most desired to see—Robin Hood, the outlaw!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DURING Ned's absence from the town others interested in the fate of Tom Ainsley had been by no means idle.

Acting under instructions given by Ainsley, Bob Trainor and a party of four or five had found much of the treasure taken by the prisoner from the secret hiding-places of the outlaws and buried by him in different places.

Some of the Men in Green had been met upon these occasions, and had been shot down without mercy by the miners.

A new stage line had been started, and on its first trip had brought half a dozen eligible young women, every one of whom had quickly been engaged to marry some one of the settlers, and as all were good matches, the town was in a great state of hilarity over the event.

On its second trip the new stage had been attacked by a small party of the outlaws, but as the occupants were ready for just such an occurrence, the evil-doers were routed, not a man of them remaining alive.

The next day a large party, headed by Bob Trainor, Jeff Ferguson, Sam White and others, discovered one of the hiding-places of the outlaws and broke it up, killing all those who opposed them.

Hood narrowly escaped with his life, as many shots were fired at him, and he only got off by leaping from the bank into the river, and swimming under water a long distance.

Every one of the party saw him, and they could not doubt any longer that he and Tom Ainsley were different persons.

Certain men in the town suddenly decamped under suspicious circumstances, and in the cabin of one of these were found communications from Hood, plans and details of an attack to be made on the place, and other matters of a criminating nature.

Time wore on, however, and the day fixed for Ainsley's execution had nearly arrived, without anything being discovered which would save his life.

Unless something could be learned, he would have to suffer death; the law would take its course, and an innocent man be punished for another's crime.

However, the evidence was against him, the jury had found him guilty, the majority of the townsmen believing him so, and the sentence must be carried out.

Hood, the outlaw, had been deprived of many of his comrades by death; others had abandoned him through fear, and had gone elsewhere to continue their career of crime unchecked.

One wild, stormy night, alone and deserted by all his late companions, he sat in a little cabin far away from any human habitation, reflecting on the past.

"It looks as if the game were up," he muttered to himself. "The boys have all deserted or been killed by the settlers, and here I am without a single friend."

"The girl is still in my power, though, and I shall not give her up, come what will. I have sworn to wed her and so I shall."

"I have a fleet horse, and I know my road. This very night I leave these parts forever, and in another region I shall live a different life."

"I have money enough to last me some time, and once away from here, I shall not fear detection; for in a new disguise, under a new name, I will live unsuspected and enjoy the fruits of my labors here."

"Yes, I swear that Cora Ainsley shall go with me, be my wife, and live but for me. Her brother dead, her lover absent, what can she hope for if she refuses me?"

There he sat musing, his head buried in his hands, his form bent over the fire, while the wind whistled without unnoticed.

Suddenly there came a sharp rap at the door, and the man's reverie was broken.

Starting up suddenly, he looked around and then called out loudly:

"Come in!"

The door was thrown open instantly, and a young man entered.

It was Ned Henderson!

The outlaw leaped to his feet, and made a grab for his pistols.

He had taken off his belt containing them, and this was at the other side of the room.

Ned slammed the door against it, and, weapon in hand, said:

"So—so; we meet again face to face. Sit down. I am not going to shoot an unarmed man."

"What do you want? My life?"

"No; I want the truth."

"About what?"

"Where is Cora Ainsley?"

"Where you will not find her."

"She is alive?"

"Yes."

"Thank Heaven!"

"And will shortly be my wife."

"She has consented then?" cried Ned, breathlessly.

"Of course! You don't think I'd marry her without, do you? To be sure not!"

"I will not believe it unless I hear it from her own lips."

"H'm! You think she cares for you? I gave her the choice of returning to you or taking me, and she chose the latter."

"It is a lie! That is not all I want to know, however. What do you know of the murder for which Ainsley is wrongly held?"

"Much!"

"You are the criminal!"

"No; though I had something to do with it."

"It was you, for Trainor recognized you, only he thought it was Ainsley, in the dusky light."

"It was not I that shot Jim Wyckoff; it was one of my men. The shot was fired from the hut from behind. I fired over the man's head to blind him."

"Do you think I will believe this?"

"Look you. Ainsley is in danger of his life. I am going to marry his sister. Do I want to kill him, then? No, indeed. I can and will save him. Will you listen?"

"Yes."

"Some few years ago Wyckoff and I—he was then known under the name of Wentworth, which was his true one—he and I were both in love with the same girl, and that girl was Cora Ainsley."

"But she says she never knew you?"

"She did not, but I had seen her and loved her. Wentworth gained her love and I hated him. I forged his employer's name to a note and threw the suspicion on him, and, to escape punishment, he fled."

"I followed him here, saw him under his new name, sought to make terms with him, but he refused."

"I was determined to have the girl, and swore to hunt him down and disgrace him—to kill him, even, if he would not give her up."

"I met him one night at the lone hut—it was I that Bob Trainor saw on the road—and demanded that he should renounce her forever. He replied angrily, and I raised my pistol threateningly."

"One of my confederates was in the hut. He had found Ainsley's lost pistol, and at that moment had it in his hand."

"He hated Ainsley, and saw the opportunity to be avenged upon him."

"He knew the resemblance between us. He knew that Ainsley would be suspected of the crime."

"He and I fired together; his bullet entered the side of Wyckoff's head and killed him; mine flew harmlessly over him."

"Trainor suddenly rushed up and discovered me. I fled in haste. My confederate jumped out of the window of the hut into the ravine, and made his escape, afterwards throwing Ainsley's pistol in the path where it was found."

"This man was one of the jury that tried Ainsley, and he has never been suspected of being anything but a square man."

"Now he is dead, but this story is true, and I can swear to it. It suited me to have Ainsley believed guilty, and many of the lawless acts I committed were laid at his door."

"His resemblance to me has caused me annoyance in my turn, however, as my men mistook him for me, and, in that manner, he learned many of our secrets and gave us a deal of trouble."

"However, all is fair in war, and I can't blame him for paying me in my own coin. Still, I don't want to see him die, and that is why I tell you this."

"I am going to give up this life, for I am sick of it, and with one I love begin a new existence in a new land."

"You swear that what you have told me is true?"

"Yes, and to-morrow, if you repeat it, Ainsley will be set free. Here is a packet, in which is a statement of all the facts I have related, signed by my own name—Robert Hood."

"Then that is your real name?"

"Yes, for Rob Hood is easily made Robin Hood, and hence the idea of this dress, which I wear for the last time to-night."

The man then drew a small, sealed packet from his breast pocket and held it toward Ned.

"Throw it on the table."

"You suspect me?"

"I will not trust you, repentant as you seem."

The man threw the packet across the room, and Ned stooped to pick it up.

In that instant Hood suddenly bounded across the narrow space and seized the young fellow by the throat.

Ned half arose, grappled with his enemy, and then both fell heavily to the floor, Ned's weapon being discharged.

Hood attempted to wrest it from him, and then began a struggle which promised to end only with the death of one or both of the combatants.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THOUGH Hood had indeed told the truth in regard to the murder, and though the packet he had thrown toward Ned really contained a detailed statement of the affair, it was by no means his intention that the young man should leave the cabin.

His avowed penitence was but a blind, and his throwing the packet at Ned but a ruse in order to gain time.

That he had lied in regard to Cora's having promised to become his wife, the reader of course knows, and this was but another trick to deceive Ned.

He knew that Ned did not believe him, and therefore wished to make him a prisoner until he could get far enough away to elude pursuit.

He had therefore sprung upon his brave young enemy, and was now determined to either kill or overpower him.

Then he would mount his horse and ride away, with Cora in his possession, and the men of Nuggetville might whistle for him in vain.

Ned knew that the man was false, and that his life was not worth a rush if his enemy once got the upper hand.

This made his fight with the utmost desperation.

The outlaw struggled to tear the pistol from his hand, and in the effort another chamber was discharged.

The bullet whizzed close to Ned's head, and the boy threw his whole weight upon the outlaw and bore him to the floor.

Crack!

Hood had seized the weapon and pulled the trigger.

At the same instant Ned had forced him backwards, both man and boy being locked in close embrace.

The bullet entered the outlaw's breast, and he gave a convulsive gasp.

His grasp relaxed, and Ned released himself and leaped to his feet.

The man lay still, the blood flowing from his mouth.

"The villain has killed himself!" Ned cried. As he spoke the outlaw raised himself upon his elbow and laughed bitterly.

He had the weapon in his hand, and he now raised it and fired.

The ball struck Ned in the fleshy part of his left arm.

In an instant he had thrown himself upon the man and taken the weapon from him.

"You are dying," he said. "Where have you hidden the young lady?"

"Find out for yourself," said Hood, with a mocking laugh, and then fell back convulsively.

Ned bent over him and half raised him from the floor.

"Speak, man!" he cried. "You have but a few moments to live. Repair the wrong you have done ere you die."

"If she shall not be mine," said Hood, with an effort, "she neither shall be yours."

Then he fell limp in Ned's arms, and the young man laid him gently back upon the floor.

Ned begged him to speak, but the man turned away from him and tried to reach the door.

Even this effort was too much for him, and he fell back exhausted.

"You are dying!" cried Ned again; "the ball has entered a vital part; remove the guilt from your soul and tell me all."

"Never!" cried Hood, staggering to his feet and taking a step forward.

There was a sudden rush of blood from his mouth, and then he reeled and fell heavily, clutching his heart.

When Ned reached and lifted him up he was dead!

"He is gone!" muttered our hero. "Gone, and never told his secret."

Then drawing the body to one side, he began looking around him, to see if there were any secret hiding-places in the cabin.

Suddenly he heard the neigh of a horse, as if at the back of the cabin.

Running outside, he found that the house was built right against the rock, under a ledge, and that the horse was not behind it as he had supposed from the sound.

Entering the cabin again, he sounded the rear wall with the stock of his rifle.

At one place it gave forth a hollow sound. Ned kicked heavily upon this portion, and presently one of the slabs fell in.

It was the work of but a few minutes to tear away several more of the slabs.

An opening was thus revealed, leading in under the ledge to a rocky chamber, some twelve feet deep.

At the end of this a horse was tethered.

Seizing a brand from the fire, Ned rushed in, and discovered a small door set into the rocky wall, and evidently leading to some secret chamber beyond.

He pounded upon this door, which was secured by a padlock, and called out loudly:

"Who is there?"

Then he heard a scream, and a voice immediately afterwards pronounced his own name

"Cora!"

"Yes, it is I. Oh, Ned, release me from this horrible place."

Ned did not stop to secure the key of the padlock, but, seizing the staple, wrenched it from its place with one powerful wrench.

Throwing open the door, he beheld a small, cell-like apartment, about six feet square, hollowed out of the rock.

In another moment Cora fell fainting in his arms.

Carrying her into the outer room, Ned placed her on the bench and soon brought her to consciousness.

A few moments sufficed to tell her all that had happened.

"And now we must hasten," he said, "for the time is short. I must reach the town by the morning, or your brother is lost."

Ned opened the packet which Hood had given him, and found that everything the man had told him was here written down, besides much more concerning his life.

His name was Robert Hood, but he had been known as Hudson, Wild Tom, Jones and many other titles, having engaged in many deeds of crime which required him to change his name in order to avoid detection.

He was innocent of the murder of Wyckoff, though he had been a party to it, and had allowed an innocent man to be placed in peril of his life on account of it.

Ned secured the packet in an inner pocket, and then, carrying the body of the dead out-

law into the cave, led out the horse which had belonged to him.

"This beast must bear us both," he said, "and we must ride fast, or our coming will be of no avail."

At that instant a loud clap of thunder was heard, which seemed to shake the little cabin to its foundations.

An instant later the wind was heard howling with renewed vigor, and then a flood of rain burst upon them.

It beat against the house, it dashed in the window, it rushed down the rude chimney, putting out the fire and filling the room with smoke.

The thunder and lightning were incessant, and the rain poured down with such force as to threaten their being speedily flooded from the place, and sent out into the storm with no shelter to cover their heads.

The horse seemed restive, and Ned had considerable difficulty in keeping him quiet.

The house shook as if it would be blown down, and Cora was in such terror that Ned thought best to leave it before anything happened.

The door had been torn from its leather hinges, and looking out, Ned saw that the rain had ceased in violence, although the wind blew a gale.

Assisting Cora to mount, Ned took his place in the saddle, and rode out of the cabin and down the pass.

Crash!

They had not gone ten paces before a mass of rock overhanging the cabin, which the rain had loosened, fell with a great crash, and buried the little hut beneath it.

"What an escape!" murmured Ned. "A moment longer in the cabin, and we would have perished!"

Then giving rein to his horse, Ned dashed away in the darkness, the lightning being his only guide along the wild and dangerous road.

"God grant we arrive in time," muttered Ned, as he rode away; and, indeed, the utmost haste was necessary.

CHAPTER XXX.

The storm had ceased, and morning was breaking, when a horse, bearing two riders, could have been seen rushing along a road leading to Nuggetville.

It was called a road by courtesy, but it was little more than a bridle-path, and was blocked up here and there by fallen trees, tangled shrubbery or bowlders, which the floods had washed into it.

It led through the wildest country imaginable, now through dense woods, now along the river bank, and now between high ledges of rock, which seemed ready to fall at any moment on the heads of the riders below.

Ten miles separated the riders from the town, and those ten miles must be made within a certain time, or an innocent man will suffer an ignominious death.

Ned had ridden as fast as he had dared during the night, but now that it was lighter he could urge his steed at greater speed.

With a double load, however, he could not go as fast as though Ned only were riding.

The way was dangerous, and Ned did not care to run any risks.

He must save Ainsley, but he must not imperil Cora's life.

A stumble might break the animal's leg, also, and then they could not hope to reach the goal in safety.

Caution, as well as speed, was necessary, therefore.

As the road grew lighter Ned urged his steed onward, but the animal was greatly fatigued, and the young man did not dare to make him go too fast, for fear of his breaking down.

At times the road would allow of their making good speed, but then it would become so strewn with obstacles as to oblige them to pick their way most carefully.

And all this while the hours were fleeing, and the time for the execution drawing nearer.

Finally the worst part of the road is passed, and Ned spurs the animal on as rapidly as he can go.

He catches a glimpse of the sun, and knows that the time is short.

There are still five miles to be accomplished before he can reach the town.

"Oh, for another hour of time, or that the journey was at an end!"

Panting, reeking with foam and dust, snorting and whinnying, the horse dashes forward, carrying his double burden, and Ned urges him still faster with a kindly word and a gentle pat of the hand upon his outstretched neck.

Suddenly they come to a stand-still.

A great gap in the path yawns before them.

The rains have washed the earth away, and a deep and wide chasm blocks their progress.

"My God! we shall be too late."

"Leap the gap!" cries Cora. "Let me dismount, and do you make your way ahead alone. You can return for me when all is safe."

"No, no! I must not! I dare not! We must go on together."

Then reining back a few yards, Ned urges the horse forward at his utmost speed.

The brave animal fairly flies over the ground, reaches the gap, takes the awful leap, and whirls through the air like the wind.

It is his last effort.

He reaches the other side, sinks down, and utters a plaintive neigh.

Ned quickly leaps off and takes Cora in his arms.

The poor steed can go no further, and they must continue on foot.

That terrible leap has cost him his life; his eyes have already a glassy look, his tongue hangs from his mouth, and a white froth covers his jaws.

He gives one convulsive gasp, turns over upon his side, and then lies dead upon the dewy sward.

"Poor beast!" murmurs Ned. "He has served us well, and God grant that it has not been in vain!"

"Haste, Ned, haste!" cries Cora. "You must not lose a moment. I will follow on alone."

And yet she walks along by his side, keeping pace with him as if as anxious to get ahead as he.

Ned cannot leave the brave girl, and he takes her hand, assisting her over the rough places; sometimes taking her in his arms and sometimes walking by her side.

Higher climbs the sun in the heavens; nearer draws the hour appointed for the execution.

Faster and faster, breathless and panting, hurry the two messengers, and now the little town comes in sight.

Ned seizes Cora in his arms and runs with

[THE END.]

her down the steep, along the river, along the dusty road and into the town.

All seems deserted, but as he hurries on Ned sees a crowd in front of Sam White's.

Cora begs to be placed on her feet, and then the two faithful ones hurry forward, reach the tavern and stagger upon the long, wide piazza.

"Stop! stop!" shouts Ned, waving a paper in his hand. "Ainsley is innocent!"

The crowd parts left and right, and a woman, one of the new-comers, raises Cora up and bears her into the house, for she has fainted.

"What's that!" cries Bob Trainor, hurrying up. "You have the proof!"

"Yes, yes; he is innocent! Stop the execution!"

A tremendous shout goes up from the crowd, and a rush is made towards a point further down the road.

Here the gallows has been erected, and at that very instant Tom Ainsley stands under the beam, the rope around his neck, the black cap over his face.

The crowd surge forward, and many think that a rescue is to be attempted.

The sheriff is about to cut the rope supporting the trap, when he suddenly turns and sees Ned bounding forward, waving a paper above his head.

"Innocent!" he shouts.

"Innocent!" echoes the crowd, and Ainsley hears it and nearly faints.

He is led away from the fatal beam, his arms are unpinioned, the cap taken from his head, the noose thrown aside, and then all is as still as death, while Ned reads the proof of his innocence.

He has been saved from the gallows at the last moment, and Ned kept his oath.

Three years went by, and then Cora Ainsley became the wife of Ned Henderson, thus keeping the promise she had made.

Her claim turned out to be one of the richest in the country, and already she was a wealthy woman.

Ainsley's own abandoned claim had also proved to be a good investment, and, as well as being rich, the man was one of the most popular fellows in all the town.

The latter had grown greatly in size and importance, Jack Quoins having invested in a power-press, and built himself a fine house, and all on account of the Nugget.

Outlaws gave the town a wide berth, and even Gentleman Dick closed up his place and went elsewhere to ply his trade, although he had always been honest enough, as gamblers go.

Bob Trainor found a wife to replace the one he had lost, and never envied Ned his good luck, the two being firm friends from the day that they clasped hands in the court, and swore to save Ainsley from death.

The verdict against the latter was of course reversed, and those of the jurors influenced by Hood quickly put as many miles as possible between them and Nuggetville.

Ted Ferguson afterwards ran the stage line, and many years later had the pleasure of bringing back to the town, after a long tour in Europe, Mr. Edward Henderson and his lovely wife, the happy pair having felt a desire to look once more upon the places where they had loved and toiled, suffered and triumphed, the birthplace of their happiness, and the place which had seen the rise and fall of that famous band of desperadoes, now no more, THE MEN IN GREEN.

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